

THE MARRIAGE OF CHIFFON

BY GYP

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
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MADAME MAURICE BARRÈS

AFFECTUEUX SOUVENIR DE

GYP

6 Juin, 1894

THE MARRIAGE OF CHIFFON

"OFFICER'S wife What an idea! I should prefer to be a menial in a hotel."

The Marquise de Bray shrugged her shoulders.

"When you hear the name of the officer in question—"

"Even should it be M. de Trene, who is considered so chic, I will not have him. So—"

"You would not have him! Really! Yet you have no right to be so hard to please, when—"

"When my father only left debts behind him, and you do not possess a sou!" Ah I know this sentence by heart: you repeated it to me so many times that I have not forgotten it, believe me!"

"Well, what about it?"

"Well never mind if I *am* penniless, I will never marry against the desire of my heart."

"Besides," timidly put in de Bray, "you may not be rich, but still you will have a dowry."

"A dowry?" cried the surprised child, "a dowry that you will give me then?"

Her soft eyes, of a very pale grey, which were laughing through long, thick brown eyelashes, rested affectionately on her stepfather.

Irritated, Madanie de Bray said drily:

"There is no need to tell her what she need not know, it will only render her more difficult."

"What difficult?" exclaimed Coryse indignantly. "Difficult in what? I was sixteen three months ago and nobody has asked to marry me, so far as I know?"

"Yes, somebody asked—and you refused him before even hearing who it was."

"That's because I will never marry an officer—never will I do that! I see many officers' wives; there is no lack of them in the four regiments—well, for nothing in the world would I be in the place of any of them. I am not built for that! I have not the required temper, I am not polite enough—I feel that if my colonel had a wife like Madame de Bassigny, for instance, nothing could induce me to visit her, nothing!"

Turning towards the end of the sitting room as if for moral support, she enquired,

"Am I not right, Uncle Mare?"

—Allowing Uncle Mare no time to reply, Madame de Bray declared:

"This does not concern your uncle. Will you, yes or no, listen to me an instant?"

She continued, solemnly,

"The man who honours you with a request for your hand is the Duc d'Aubieres."

She stopped, reckoning upon her daughter's surprise. Indeed, the disturbed face of Coryse expressed an extreme stupor. Madame de Bray mistook it for a joyful shock and asked triumphantly.

"Well, what have you to say to that?"

"Say?" replied the girl with a laugh, "I feel stunned."

And, paying no heed to her mother's threatening glare, she went on:

"Yes, he is at least forty, Monsieur d'Aubieres, since he is a colonel—he is rather ugly and I hear it every instant that he has no wealth."

The Marquise looked her daughter up and down, scornfully:

"Ah! now we have it complete!—She must also have money!"

Coryse shook her fair head:

"Oh! not at all. Money makes no difference to me. so

long as I am not a duc—a duchess, I mean. But that's ridiculous; a big title with a small fortune. I will not say that if I had one, I would, not being rich, bury it in the cellar—no! My title might bother me, but I would carry it all the same, since I could not be blamed for having got it. However it is not only on account of the title that I am refusing him."

"Is it on account of his career?"

"It is mostly on account of himself."

"But you said a hundred times that he is charming—that you liked him very much."

"Certainly, I like him much!—but not to marry him! Moreover, I find him too old—and if I had to spend all my time with him, I have an idea that that would not be funny."

The Marquise gave her husband a baleful glance and replied:

"One does not get married to get fun!"

"Well there you are, but in my case I will only marry to have it so!"

"The child is crazy! I prefer not to discuss it further."

Rising, and with a step which she imagined to be noble but was only ridiculous, the Marquise marched out.

When the door had been closed with a bang, M. de Bray said softly:

"You are wrong, my little Coryse, to—to—"

Coryse, unmoved by her mother's noisy exit, suddenly sat upright in the large armchair in which, ensconced among cushions, she could scarcely be seen.

"Why do you call me Coryse? Why do you not say Chiffon? Are you angry too?"

"I am not at all angry but—well—"

"Yes, you are angry, I can see it! Now, tell me first what you wanted to say when I cut you off."

"Nothing—I don't remember."

"Well, I know. You were saying 'you are wrong to—' where am I wrong?"

"In arguing as you did with your mother."

"What! must I be married against my will; without defending myself?"

"I am not saying that."

"Then what are you saying?"

"I say that—that without—without—"

"You see! You are baffled!"

"But—"

"You are in a mess, and there's no getting out of it! And I challenge you to get out of your explanation. Yes! Either I don't let them do what they want and I argue, or I don't argue and I let them."

"You could, after all, discuss the matter, but in another tone, and above all with other terms. Your language exasperates your mother."

"Yes, I know, she likes a noble style!"

All the tenderness and infinite kindness in the child's eyes vanished, and she added stiffly:

"She is so refined!"

M. de Bray replied, in a grieved tone:

"You are hurting me very much."

"My God! And I never want to cause you any pain! I love you very much, believe me."

"And I too, love you much."

"Then why do you want to turn me out, to marry me to—"

"But I do not want to do anything of the kind."

"Yes! you want it! And I am only sixteen and a half! I beseech you to leave me in peace! Let me live here still—"

She interrupted herself, and counting on her finger tips:

"Still another five years—even not quite five. After that I will go, I promise you."

The soft grey eyes were troubled and dimmed with tears.

Corysande d'Avesnes, otherwise, Coryse, but usually called Chiffon, was a strong and supple girl, with still a few of the angles and disproportions of childhood and the translucent skin of the child. Her nimble movements, were at times slightly clumsy, and irritated her mother as much as the slight incorrectness of her speech.

The Marquise de Bray, who was highly infatuated with herself, generally considered those with whom social necessities compelled her to live as inferior nobodies, whom she greatly honoured by condescending to stoop to their level. She had spent her life despising and tormenting the simple and kind people around her, beginning with the Comte d'Avesnes, Coryse's father, who had the sense to die two years after. He had made no bones, moreover, in arranging elsewhere for himself an existence such as he found impossible in his own home. His widow, without means, had installed herself, with her daughter, in the house of an uncle and aunt who worshipped the child and brought her up until her mother's second marriage. As for Madame d'Avesnes, she was only making short appearances at the house of uncle and aunt de Launay. She was accustomed to travel, sometimes staying at Paris, sometimes with friends, being unable, so she said, to get used to provincial life.

It was in the course of a visit to Pont-sur-Sarthe that M. de Bray felt attracted to her. He was well off, and very charming. She, on her side, was beginning to ripen, and she well understood that her beauty, dependent upon freshness and bloom, would soon and suddenly disappear. Instead, therefore, of behaving towards the Marquis as she had done with many others, she cleverly brought him

round to marry her. She resigned herself to living in Pont-sur-Sarthe, since she could not shine elsewhere, and let it be widely known that her marriage with M. de Bray was out of sheer devotion to her daughter and to ensure her future. Then began for the poor husband the most awful existence, made up of hawlings and silences, of scenes and reconcilements, such as she had created for his predecessor and also for uncle and aunt de Launay, who bore it all for the love of their little "Chiffon," and their fear of being separated from her.

But it was her daughter whom Madame de Bray plagued the worst of all. Everything in the child's nature was in contradiction with her mother's ideas which were very narrow on certain points and immoderately large on others. Infatuated with aristocracy, and also with money since she had some—loving above all pomp and pose, she never forgave little Coryse her simplicity and frankness, which she did not understand. As she did not belong, strictly speaking, to any definite type of womanhood, the Marquise had created one of her own with sundry and hackneyed likenesses. She had learnt to speak at the theatre, and to think from novels. As she did not possess any foundation of fineness of sentiment or sensation she ill-applied what she did not fully understand, and produced—for instance, when she tried to be tragical—some intensely preposterous effects which provoked in Chiffon crises of wild mirth.

Vulgar herself in demeanour and aspect, Madame de Bray always taxed her daughter with being common, and devoid of that distinction which was "an attribute of the Avesnes."

Seeing that Coryse was crying (she who never cried), M. de Bray, quite upset, only thought of consoling her as best he could.

"Come, my little Chiffon, be reasonable and all will

come right in the end."

She retorted, while despondently shaking her head: "Do you think it will come right through my marrying M. d'Aubieres? Well, I should want nothing better, be sure of it, if I did not feel that, doing it, I should do something wrong. I should make him unhappy, otherwise I would marry him immediately to rid the others of myself."

"It is bad to speak so, Chiffon."

"You know well I do not mean it for you. you know it well."

"But your mother is no more desirous than I to see you go."

"Don't you believe it. She thinks of nothing else! She is too badly afraid that I may not get married and, above all, that I may not wed a high class man. Not that she wants that for my own happiness, oh! no! that is a mere detail! It would be to satisfy her vanity, for the satisfaction of arousing jealousy in many others—to amaze the people of Pont-sur-Sarthe and annoy her own friends—and for no other purpose."

"I am very sorry to hear you speak so of your mother."

"I cannot help saying what I think!"

"May be, but you must not think so."

"And how am I to stop thinking of it? How can I believe that she has any love for me? Before you came into the family did she ever think of me except to scold me—or those whom she accused of spoiling me? Without uncle and aunt de Launay, and you later on, would I ever have been caressed and cared for? Oh! I beg your pardon, caressed I was, twice yearly, when leaving upon and returning from her journeys. That took place under the porch, and I rebelled at the thought that she had come back to this home so calm and peaceful when she was away. And then, raptures! 'My Corysande! my beloved daughter!'

One might have thought that a drama was being enacted and I had been discovered in an underground cave! She lifted me up—she squeezed me, so hard as to choke me, against her corsets! And it was all done so that it may be witnessed by the coachman and the servants unloading her luggage. But that did not fool them, they know her too well! Yet all the same she regularly presented them that little melodramatic scene.”

Laughing again, the child concluded, good-naturedly:

“She always lacked in simplicity, you know.”

“You exaggerate certain imperfections, my child.”

“I exaggerate? But perhaps you cannot believe it, you who are so little affected, so little mindful of the effects that you may produce.”

“You take pleasure in being contrary to your Mamma over trifles.”

“Mamma! Be careful! If she heard you!”

As M. de Bray glanced uneasily towards the door she exclaimed:

“You were nervous, eh!”

She continued: “—You forgot that ‘Mamma’ is a name good enough for the rabble—a word to be left for the use of menials. People of good birth express themselves otherwise—”

“Since she has a weakness for such petty details, why not satisfy her?”

“But I do! I never do otherwise! When speaking to her I do not call—, I avoid—but when referring to her I say ‘my mother’ loudly. My mouth may use the term,—but it is not in my heart. It is not my fault, really! I tried to, especially since you replaced my poor Daddy! You have been so good to the wild, ugly little maiden who did not want to see you—and I loved you so much since I came to know you that, just to please you, I wished to love

your wife,—but it was useless, I never could!

"I am attached to her in a way, I should be very sorry if anything untoward happened to her and I only wish her to be happy. But when I do not see her I breathe more freely, that's certain."

Seeing consternation on her stepfather's face, she went on:

"But, you know, what I have told you, I never mentioned it to any one else."

"That is indeed fortunate!" stammered the poor man.

"But it is true, I trust nobody but you—"

She glanced, over his shoulder, at the Count de Bray who was rocking himself, silently, in a caned arm-chair, and added:

"And also Uncle Mare! Why are you not saying something, uncle?"

Uncle Mare, a tall and elegant man, replied in a slightly musical voice:

"Simply because I have nothing to say. Moreover, before I even tried to speak, your mother enjoined me to keep silent. Therefore—!"

"I know that very well! But as she is no longer here—"

"Since she left you have stated some true facts, my dear Chiffon and as I am not to say you are right, I am keeping my mouth shut."

"You too are kind!"

"Oh, I am excellent! But will you leave me alone, you little goose?" added he, suddenly rising and making Coryse slip off in the act of clinging to his knee like a baby.

Surprised, she asked:

"Why are you pushing me away?"

"Because you are too big for such monkey tricks! At your age! Do you call it mannerly?"

"Why, may I not sit on my uncle's knees, now?"

And she added roguishly :

“Ah ! If you were not my uncle !—

“Well, that’s just it,” retorted Marc de Bray sullenly. “The fact is that, precisely, I am not your uncle.”

“Oh !” said the girl, suddenly sorrowful, “how wicked of you to tell me that !”

She stretched herself in one of those feline movements that were natural to her and began to sob, her face buried in a cushion of the couch.

“Now !” said Uncle Marc irritated. “What is the matter with her to-day ? She, who never cries easily, keeps whimpering !”

“Be a little lenient,” said M. de Bray, “she is unnerved by that marriage affair.”

“I can understand that.”

“Take care not to let her hear you,—she would finally send this poor d’Aubieres to the devil !”

“Well, but you are not going to let such an absurd union become a fact, I hope.”

“Her mother has so made up her mind that I see no help for it.”

“She is mad ! Aubieres is twenty-five years older than Chiffon !”

“If I am to believe gossips, little de Liron worships you—and she is twenty years younger than you ?”

“Suppose it is so—she may be worshipping me to-day, but will she to-morrow ?”

“I can also quote the example of our mother, who is twenty-five years less than her husband and always loved him passionately—”

“My reply to that is that one can only find such instances in his own family. Meanwhile poor Chiffon is in tears and it is painful to see it.”

He went to the couch and, stroked her hair, saying

affectionately :

"Little Chiffon, forgive me for grieving you—

She raised her tear-stained face and asked :

"Why were you so wicked? Why did you say you were not my uncle?"

"But just because although I love you as much as if I really was your uncle, the bare fact is that I am not. I am the brother of your mother's husband, that is to say no relation to you. I could marry you if I was not as aged as my friend d'Aubieres whom you are so nicely turning down—"

"Oh!" said she, flabbergasted. "You are of the same age as M. d'Aubieres?"

She added with a laugh :

"Well, you are less 'deteriorated' than he is, according to the expression used at Pont-sur-Sarthe. Yes, the other day, I was chatting in the street with an old fellow who said so, to explain that his wife was somewhat broken down."

The Marquis, uneasy, queried :

"You chatted in the street with whom? *With that* fellow?"

"A man I met when returning from my course with old Jean—I think he was a street sweeper."

"If your mother had seen you talking with that man she—"

Turning abruptly towards Uncle Mare she asked :

"Well, after all—whether you are truly my uncle or not, for five years I called you my uncle and thought you were—just as I believe that daddy is my daddy? Then perhaps you can give me your advice: Should I, or should I not marry d'Aubieres."

"Such a question is very perplexing."

"Well, if you were in my place, what would you do?"

"In your place, well, I should try to feel myself—"

"But it is just because I am feeling myself that—"

"Before saying no, I should see d'Aubières sometimes, I should—I should think over—"

"Ah! You are of the opinion that if I did see him often it might make me change my mind? Well, I,—I think just the opposite."

"Aubières is witty, he is kind, has good manners, he can only gain from being known. Without being rich he has means, and a historical name—"

"Heavens, don't I know all about him being historical? They have repeated it in my presence time and again. But I too, bear a historical name, and then, you understand, one does not prize very highly what one possesses, it is those one has not that is so desired."

"What do you desire?"

She thought a little, then said resolutely:

"Much love—or, if too difficult to get, much lots of money! There would not be a single pauper left in Pont-sur-Sarthe as you would see. Then, I would buy pictures and beautiful horses—and every evening I would have a concert. Ah! Nobody would get bored in my home, really!"

A servant opened the door.

"Madame la Marquise wishes to have a few words before dinner with Monsieur le Marquis and Monsieur le Comte. She also requests mademoiselle to go and dress—"

"Dress?" cried Coryse in surprise, "then there will be guests?"

Turning towards her stepfather and uncle she said laughingly:

"It must be M. d'Aubières! And she wants to show you the way to make him shine. Go! be off! I am going to put on my old pink frock, it is not so pretty as this one, and much dirtier! But it is 'evening!'"

She looked at M. de Bray, who was going out with his brother, and stammered, her eyes filling with tears.

"All the same, it is really hard luck when the only two people who love me are nothing to me!"

As her stepfather was turning to reply she quickly added:

"It was not nice of me to say 'the only two'. I had forgotten uncle Albert and aunt Mathilde who love me so much, and are really something to me."

Then, suddenly possessed of a new idea, she made a dive and, passing quickly under the arm of M. de Bray whose hand was on the door knob, she shouted to him with a laugh:

"In fact, I am dining with them to-night!"

Raising her voice she went on, with marked emphasis: "Tell it to 'my mother' in case she forgot it."

Running, she vanished up the stairs.

II

CHIFFON had leaped into her room, placed a hat obliquely on her fair hair, and bursting into the pantry had got hold of old Jean, who was grumbling while putting on cotton gloves too tight for his large hands:

"Come on! Quick! Take me to aunt Mathilde!"

"But, Mademoiselle! You have forgotten. There are guests for dinner—I shall have to attend at the door, and they will presently arrive."

"Oh! You have plenty of time! You will be back at once, we will run!"

"Oh! We will run!" murmured the old coachman, "and in such heat—it will be so nice to run!"

Coryse got hold of his arm and shook him roughly:

"Come on! Hurry up, or you will have me pinched!"

The man stood confounded, his fingers spread out, and asked:

"Pinched? Then you did not get permission—?"

"I have it without having it, come on"

"I bet that's not true—you haven't got it."

"Yes, I have, from Daddy."

"Just the same as if you hadn't, then! The 'permissions' from Monsieur le Marquis are of no value!"

Walking across to the dining room she stopped, surprised:

"Hallo," she cried, looking at the table, "there are several guests at dinner? I thought only M. d'Aubieres would be there—where are you going to?"

"Just to fetch my cap which is in the harness room. I'll soon catch you up."

Soon he was close behind her. Suddenly she turned round to face him, and asked:

"You know M. d'Aubieres—what do you think of him?"

"I find him a handsome colonel."

"Ah! Well, old Jean, they want me to marry him!"

"Oh!!!" said the coachman, so comically scared that the girl burst out laughing. "Oh! Impossible! But he could very nearly be your father!"

"All the same, they want it—it's Madame la Marquise."

"Ah!" said the old man, who well knew his mistress's tastes. "It's that he has a great name, Monsieur le Duc d'Aubieres!"

"Come and walk beside me," ordered Coryse who disliked having to turn back while walking. "You are giving me an ache in the neck."

"I can't walk by your side—Madame la Marquise expressly forbade it. 'In the street, you will walk five steps behind mademoiselle when escorting her,' said she."

"—to the others, but not to you who have been like my nurse. Can there be etiquette in your case. Look! We have arrived."

Jean looked at the old granite mansion in front of them, which stood up on the place du Palais as a heavy grey silhouette, and sighed heavily.

"Here is a good house! Where we were happy and had good masters! Not that I want to say a word against Monsieur le Marquis, ever! Nobody is kinder than he—but he cannot often do what he would like! But Monsieur and Madame de Launay, each did what they wanted to—which was always what the other wanted."

"You regret having left them?"

"No, seeing that I left them to be with you. But after marrying M. d'Aubieres,—or someone else—I shan't remain there long—on account of Madame la Marquise."

Chiffon did not reply.

"No doubt it is wrong of me to complain to you of all this. First of all because she is your mamma, and then, you are still more to be pitied than I am, because I can leave if I choose to, but you,—you understand?"

After a silence, the man still following the thread of his idea said:

"Do you think they will take me back, M. and Mme. de Launay? They know well that I only left them in order to stay with you, Mamzelle Coryse, and they find that since I am no longer there their horses are not so fine, nor so fat or so shining and all—"

"But you know well that you will always stay with me, old Jean, and I will take you with me when I go—"

She had lifted the knocker at the gate and stridden over

the enormous bar across the way. His eyes wet, the old coachman, leant towards her.

"What! You would still employ an old man like me?"

"Yes, you please me as you are my nurse, even though you are not good looking!"

Letting fall the knocker, she shouted to him?

"Meanwhile, run! You have barely enough time."

And, laughing at the scared look on his face, she cried.

"Perhaps you may not meet with pleasant reception at home, you know!"

Chiffon's entrance in the de Launays' dining room, as they were just sitting down to dinner, was a real event. Aunt Mathilde and uncle Albert rose up with cries of delight, and the servant allowed himself to grunt with pleasure.

The fact is, that every one loved Chiffon in this old house where she had spent her early childhood years, and to which she always returned with joy whenever she could get out.

She was ten years old when her mother, having married again, took her back from the two old people who had come to consider her as their own child. The separation was terribly painful for them, and also for the little girl who was fearful of the future.

Scolded and shaken by her mother since she was old enough to remember; taken care of and fondled by the old uncle and aunt as soon as she had returned between wheedlings and insults during the sojourns of Madame d'Avesnes at Pont-sur-Sarthe, Coryse, fundamentally gay by temperament but saddened by reflections, was living in perpetual anxiety.

When a very young child, sitting in her small arm-chair under the immobile glares of the portraits in mail and corselets of the Avesnes, between two old people who never

lost sight of her curly head, already the child was thinking.

She was thinking that it was good to live and laugh, to roll about on the carpet in the great hall or on the lawn of the garden which to her, seemed full of sun and joy. She thought it amusing to talk to the dogs, horses, birds, toys and flowers, but all that was not to endure. One day, perhaps to-morrow, they would hear in the evening, the great gate under the portico being opened; a large carriage making a very familiar noise would turn in, and uncle Albert, bending towards her, would kiss her and say, awkwardly :

"My Chiffon, it is your mother who has come, go down with Clandine to meet her."

They no longer used to tell her in advance when her mother was expected. The uncle and aunt had noticed that, when informed of her coming, she ceased to eat and sleep. She was also continually crying, but showed a brave face at the last moment, resigned when finally it "must be."

And she was thinking that, in obedience to her uncle, she would grip in her little hand a corner of Clandine's apron and step down resolutely, dry eyed, her lip hardly quivering, while the Breton woman, moved, would tell her with encouraging voice :

"Come, my poor Chiffon, you must be reasonable !"

And, in a scared voice, which she seemed to hear, she would reply :

"You, be sure not to 'thou' me, and to call me 'mademoiselle.' You know what she wants. Oh ! Be very careful !"

Certainly, the scenes and shouts raining on her irritated Coryse, but to a lesser extent than the scenes and shouts destined for others.

The sight of aunt Madeleine softly crying in her room, or of a dismissed servant, pale, and dragging his trunk down

the staircase, upset her to the point of causing her to remain sleepless a whole night in her little bed, with her eyes wide open and her jaw trembling.

And all that was foretold by the large carriage, whose rumbling she thought she could always hear, even when at play, or whose outlines, bristling with luggage, she thought to see even when she gazed at the things she loved to contemplate: water, fire and flowers.

And for years Chiffon had lived, laughing although pre-occupied, unable to forget, during eight or ten peaceful months, the few bad days elapsed, or to come, bending in advance her small, supple and strong, back in the anticipation of some awful expected shock.

The announcement of her mother's marriage, which in itself left her unmoved, terrified her when she heard that she was to leave the old mansion where she had grown, and the old relatives who had taken care of her. She knew by sight the Marquis de Bray, whom she had often seen on horseback with his brother Mare, and till then she had found him very kind. But when she saw him marry her mother she inferred that he was like her, and thought her last day had arrived.

Fully mistress of herself when she judged it necessary, she concealed her fears and was content with her silent protests. To Madame d'Avesnes, who declared to her with long sentences that it was owing to her maternal love and for her future welfare that she was re-marrying, she did not say a word in reply. And when they searched for her in order to introduce her to M. de Bray who had called on the de Launays, she went and crouched at the end of the garden in a bed of 'hortensias where she could not be found.

Pale, her lips pursed, a hard look in her eyes, she witnessed in the gloomy cathedral her mother's wedding, vaguely realizing that there disappeared the last remem-

brance of the poor father she had never known and who perhaps would have loved her.

And her heart was full of distress and rancour when she came to her new home.

M. de Bray loved her at once, but guessing all she had in her mind he did not try to hasten the time for a rapprochement. His wife's intractable temper did it however.

Scared by the tumult, cries, outbursts and frantic gestures of the Marquise, these two gay and good-hearted ones instinctively looked to each other for support, and the ultimate outcome of it was that she could only recover a little gaiety and composure when her stepfather was present.

The child had always endeavoured to conceal the terror her mother inspired in her. The din of her shouts made her straighten herself up while she affected to preserve an irritating calmness and impertinently raised up her nose while she felt her teeth chattering and her little legs shake.

But, one evening, she betrayed herself. Chased through a corridor by Madame de Bray who was abusing her, she suddenly got astride the banister and, slipping down to the bottom of the stairs, burst into the library. There believing herself alone, she flattened herself against the door, panting, anguished, listening for sounds of her mother searching for her.

Mare de Bray, who was living with his brother, was smoking, sunk in a large arm-chair far from the lamp. Softly he called the little one. She turned round, displeased at having been surprised in this moment of weakness and abandon.

"Ah!" said she angrily, "you are here."

Mare replied, chaffingly:

"Well, yes, mademoiselle Corysande! I am here! Does it annoy you?"

Chiffon never lied. She replied surlily:

"Yes, you saw me when I was frightened, and I do not like that!"

He laughed, while looking at her affectionately.

"You are really a nice Chiffon! Had you been afraid of a ghost—or a gun firing, I should say that was bad for a descendant of the Avesnes—but of your mother? Well, my poor little one, I am afraid of her, I, a bearded man! So, you may judge if I understand you."

"Ah!" whispered Coryse with more confidence. "You also? You do not look it!"

"I do not look it when she is here, it would please her too much but afterwards I make up for it and I tremble to my heart's content! This is true! This morning at breakfast when she got hold of the unfortunate Joseph I remained silent, checking my impulse, but my throat shrank like an old prune. You saw me run away to choke peacefully in the vestibule."

"You see, Chiffon, you certainly ought to tell my brother your little affairs—"

"Oh!" said Coryse, distressed.

"Yes, you should confess to him frankly your sorrows and your fears."

"What could he do?"

"Well, after all, he is the master here!"

Chiffon's eyes widened:

"Him? Master? Impossible!"

Mare de Bray burst out laughing:

"I know it does not look much like it! Your stepfather loathes arguments and scenes and always prefers giving in when he is concerned."

"Then—what?"

"Well, then, where you are concerned it is different—in remembrance of your father to whom he was a good friend, and also for your own sake—as he is very fond of you—"

Seeing her move, he insisted :

"He is very fond of you, and so am I, my little Chiffon—and if we never mentioned it before it is only because it is not easy to accost a little porcupine that rolls itself into a ball when it sees from afar those it does not want to see."

And as his brother came in he exclaimed to him :

"Come, Pierre, tell Chiffon that we are her very sincere friends, and I have an idea that this evening she will credit it."

From that day a great affection had dawned in her little heart, and she lived more peacefully.

"How is it that you came this evening, my Chiffon?" enquired uncle Albert delighted. "I thought you had guests at dinner?"

She winked, and made a grimace.

"M. d'Aubieres?" she announced.

Without giving him time to reply, she continued :

"Say in my place would you marry him?—M. d'Aubieres?"

"Chiffon!", mumbled aunt Mathilde, indicating by a glance the servant who was setting her place at the table.

"What does it matter? M. d'Aubieres must have made his request at four o'clock,—I was informed of it at five; by this evening many people in the town will know it, and to-morrow my mother will tell it to all the others. It will look grand, that way, Pont-sur-Sarthe! And it is said that there are eighty thousand inhabitants! Well, all the same, gossip does not take long to get about. *You* knew it—that M. d'Aubieres wants to marry me?"

"But," said M. de Laundy, "we heard it from your mother, who came for this purpose and invited us to call on her this evening."

"Ah! certainly; they wanted to introduce him to the family and compel me to say 'yes.'"

The aunt protested :

"But no introduction is necessary. We have known him since he was posted here, and that was long ago."

"A year ago !—The first time Uncle Mare brought him to dinner he sat next to me. I was still in short skirts—and all the time he spoke about rally-papers and chases—I was bored stiff at that dinner !"

"Chiffon!" cried Madame de Launay, reproachfully, "a slang expression again."

She showed surprise :

"Slang? Where? Oh ! 'Bored stiff', that's what you call slang? You are so very correct, aunt Mathilde !"

"It is you who are not sufficiently so ! Your mother is quite right when she reproaches you. Your manners and language ! Yes, you behave like a boy and speak like the street urchins."

"Well, they are the only people who amused me with their talk when I was small. It is not my fault if I never could find a word to say to my cousins de Lussy or the general's 'little demoiselles', as Clandine used to say, who came to have tea with me in silk frocks, and with their hair fresh from curling tongs ! In spite of all the tortures I inflicted upon my imagination the best I could do was to swing my arms foolishly before them and laugh stupidly, mocking at myself, but I could not help it ! They were joining their words, and nothing puts me out so much as that, it is so funny ! I always believe it's a comedy being played,—isn't it so, uncle Albert? You see what I mean? I am sure you do."

"Yes, yes, I know it, but don't talk so much—eat your beef which will soon be cold."

"It will be good all the same, it is so good ! It is another thing that we do not eat at home !"

"Your mother does not like it, I believe !"

"It isn't that she does not like it, but she will not have it, saying it is a dish for common people, and whatever is for common people, whether dish or anything else—"

"All right! Eat!"

"Meanwhile, you have not yet given me your advice?"

"About what?"

"Well, concerning M. d'Aubieres."

"But concerning this you must only consult yourself, my dear child," said uncle Albert: "Your mother approves of him, it is for you to see if he pleases you."

"He pleases me—yes, certainly, so far, but I never considered him from this viewpoint, and, well, if I will I very much believe that—"

Aunt Mathilde insisted:

"You must see him again, several times, that will be easy since he is a regular visitor of your parents. Then study him well, and when you have well studied him—"

"What shall I do after studying him well?"

"Well, you will consider your answer to him."

"And my answer will be 'Zut'!"

"Zut?"

Chiffon laughed.

"Ah! It is really funny to hear you say 'Zut', aunt Mathilde! You are putting no intention into it at all."

"No intention?"

"No, 'Zut!' means 'go for a walk,' or 'go to blazes' or anything similar. So you must let it out more deliberately, you understand?"

"You cannot imagine that I, at my age, can learn to say 'Zut'!"

"But you would say it well!—Usually you are not backward in your talk! aunt Mathilde! And you use expressions such as 'bored stiff,' meaning no reproach to you!"

"I am wrong!"

"Never! and it is when you do that I love you best! And listen: what I like best in M. d'Aubieres is that he is no poser. I feel sure that my style of speech never shocks him in the least, and the proof of it is—"

"And," asked M. de Launay, "what do your papa and uncle advise you to do, regarding this marriage proposal?"

"Papa does not say much, he only praises M. d'Aubieres, Uncle Marc tells me to consult my heart. Then, when they thought, once, that I was not listening to them because I was crying in a corner—"

Together, the two old people asked, troubled:

"You were crying?"

"Sure! Put yourselves in my place.—Do you imagine it is funny? Moreover it was not on this account that I was crying, it was over something else! Well, thinking I was not listening they were enumerating the people among their acquaintances who worship each other in spite of twenty or twenty-five years' difference—"

"Did they mention us?"

"No."

"Well, Chiffon, yesterday I was eighty-one, and your aunt is only sixty—"

"All the same you seem to me to be very well, as you are!" replied Chiffon, hooking herself on to her old uncle's arm while passing out to the drawing room.

"I ordered the carriage for half-past eight," said Madame de Launay. "I am going to get ready."

"The carriage! in such weather? To go two hundred yards?"

And, understanding the matter in a flash:

"The idea of it did not come from you, I bet it did not!"

"Really it is your mother who—"

"—Who suggested your driving to her place, because you

have beautiful horses, and as all the guests will leave together they will be seen! The object of it is to dazzle M. d'Aubieres. Oh! la! la! always her flash and her fuss!"

While the de Launays were preparing to go, Chiffon, sitting in a big arm-chair, was affectionately looking all over the drawing room in which she had so often played in the past. She loved old Empire style couch, covered with Utrecht velvet with canary stripes and with its brass sphinxes; the small, low cabinets ending level with the floor, dissimulated under white wainscoting, in which she used to hide her toys; also the beautiful Louis XVI panellings, so intact and so laughing, with their satyrs and nymphs playing about through thickets, whom Clandine, her maid, described as "men and women tickling each other against the wall"; and the old timepiece with its eagles; and the Sevres urns, tiresome but charming.

There, Chiffon lived again the happy hours of her early childhood, and it was on a really convinced tone that she told her old friends who were calling her, to go with them:

"Ah! it feels really good to be here!"

Arriving at the de Bray mansion she climbed the steps at a run, ahead of her uncle and aunt, shouting to them:

"Tell them I am coming! I have got to dress! I would be scolded if I went in as I am! I shall appear in my old pink frock!"

III

COMING into the brilliantly lit hall, Coryse stopped, examining, with that winking habitual to short-sighted people, those who were talking there, seated in a large circle. She remained an instant, hesitating, wondering whom she ought to approach first. Then she marched on towards an old woman who was silent and possessed a fine profile, and she bowed in a movement which, considering her usual behaviour appeared to be very respectful.

Coryse liked the Comtesse de Varville for several reasons. She found her dignified in spite of her modest mien, and she thought her intelligent and kind. Another point in her favour was that Madame de Bray hated this old woman who saddened her drawing room with her faded dresses and her likeness to an old discoloured portrait. This hatred in itself would have sufficed to win her Chiffon's sympathy. "Corysande," said the Marquise tersely, "come and wish Madame de Bassigny."

Madame de Bassigny was a colonel's wife and Chiffon's *bête noire*. She was a very rich and very affected woman, who loved to vex and humiliate all the military households of Pont-sur-Sarthe and to have punishments inflicted on all the bachelor officers who neglected her reception days.

Coryse turned towards her and replied with an indifference which was almost impertinent.

"By and by, when I have wished Madame de Jarville."

The Marquise shot towards her daughter a furious glance, while M. d'Aubieres rested on the child his kind blue eyes, all filled with admiration and contentment.

He, too, loathed the wife of his colleague of the hussars, and was delighted at the lack of earnestness so deliberately displayed by Chiffon.

That lean woman, who had, so it was said, beaks at her elbows and a sawblade in her back, and who was as talkative as a magpie, slandered every pretty woman and mocked at the ugly or poor women really horrified him. M. d'Aubieres, too frank to dissimulate altogether this aversion, never did more towards her than was strictly prescribed by politeness.

At the beginning, Madame de Bassigny, being eager to attract to her house this good-looking bachelor bearer of a great name, showed infinite kindness towards him. She was endeavouring above all to have the most elegant and best frequented drawing room in Pont-sur-Sarthe, and at once perceived that the attendance of the Duc d'Aubieres was indispensable to the establishment of its supremacy. A duke is a personage in any circle, but in a province he becomes a great personage.

When the Duc d'Aubieres first made his appearance, it was thought that his title dated from the Empire, and people looked curiously at him. But when it became known that old Monsieur de Blamont had ascertained that the title was anterior to the revision of 1667 the curiosity turned to admiration. Besides, the duke with his small fortune kept himself well, he owned fine horses which he rode well, a phaeton in fine condition, a small house only for himself, full, so it was rumoured, of pretty 'nicknacks, in the new quarter near the station, and so he had become the aim of every mother, widow and demi-mondaine of Pont-sur-Sarthe.

But notwithstanding all the attentions with which Colonel and Madame Bassigny overwhelmed him, he was formal and reserved, content with being polite but nothing more.

Luckier than her friend, Madame de Bray, had the joy of exhibiting the Duc d'Aubieres in her drawing room. He was much attached to her brother-in-law, Mare, who intro-

duced him, not fearing, this time, that she might receive with her usual disdain such a brilliant comrade.

And while all the prettiest women—including Madame de Bray, who though in her declining years was still attractive—were competing in courting him, the duke had eyes for none except the slender, strong backed, dreamy imp who affectionately laughed with him, heedless of smart young men who decorated her mother's hall. He guessed something of the miseries that troubled Chiffon's life, and Uncle Marc told him the rest. Unconsciously, and gradually at the age of forty-three, he fell deeply in love with the fifteen-year old child.

When M. d'Aubieres discovered what was going on in his heart he thought: "I must be mad!"

Then, through dreaming of this marriage which at first had seemed impossible, he came to ask himself, a little later: "Why not?"

To-night the poor fellow was full of fear and anguish, and tried to catch Chiffon's eye, in order to read in it the impression made by his proposal.

But Chiffon obstinately avoided to meet his look. After summarily bowing to Madame de Bassigny, she was now talking with a lean and frail young man with a receding forehead and weak chin, who was the Vicomte de Barfleur, scion of the oldest family in the province and one of the fops of Pont-sur-Sarthe. And although their conversation appeared, from Coryse's wearied and absent-minded look, entirely devoid of interest, M. d'Aubieres felt annoyed to see her occupied with somebody, and conceived a dislike to the wretched lad.

Abruptly a beautiful and tall girl, Genevieve de Lussy, cousin of the Avesnes, exclaimed:

"Chiffon, why did you not attend the course this afternoon?"

"What!" asked the astounded Madame de Bray, "you did not go to your course?"

Coryse, her face flushed, had left young Barfleur in the lurch, and, advancing towards her mother said:

"No, I did not go to the course, I stayed in the garden—"

Turning towards M. de Bray, an entreaty in her eyes:

"The weather was so fine!"

"And where did you go?"

After addressing her with the familiar "tu" (thou) she had shifted to the more formal "vous" (you).

Until her daughter reached the age of five, she used to say "you" to her, and the child did the same to her. The mother did not admit that it could be otherwise, because, she affirmed, the "thouing" between parents and children dated from the Revolution. It was an ignoble habit which levelled all classes etc. . . . Then, one day, returning from one of her journeys, she had declared that "thou" was more affectionate, that alone it denoted intimacy, confidence; that now all the ladies of the Faubourg Saint-Germain "thoued" their children and made them "thou" them, and so suddenly, she commanded Coryse to say "tu" to her, in the future. The poor little one would rather have used a still more formal expression than "vous" and found it hard to use an appellation so far from her heart and lips. Madame de Bray also often made a slip. When carried away by an argument she shouted "vous" to Chiffon as in the past. Coryse replied:

"I have just told you, I was playing truant."

"Idling?"

"No—"

"What did you do?"

"I was admiring the flowers—"

"Just what I said!"

And, with importance, as though she needed to keep herself posted to watch the development of her daughter's studies and make her pick up the lost time :

"What were they teaching to-day?"

"At the class?" asked the girl, trying an instant to recollect it, "we were on the subject of reproduction."

In the midst of a surprised silence she went on :

"The reproduction of phanerogamous plants."

Uncle Mare shrugged his shoulders, whispering softly :

"Chiffon did right in studying by herself the flowers in the garden—at least there was no disadvantage in it."

As for the Marquise who knew absolutely nothing about plants, whether phanerogamous or others, and therefore had not understood what was said, she asked in a doctoral and patronising tone :

"You heard, Coryse?"

Coryse did not answer. Genevieve resumed, speaking to her :

"And why, Mademoiselle, do you love Racine so much?"

"I don't know—" said Coryse, uninterested also.

Then, after thinking an instant, she declared :

"Perhaps it is because they wanted to make me fond of Corneille."

Mare de Bray laughed. His sister-in-law, furious, turned against him :

"One could think that you are trying to make her still more ridiculous and unbearable than she is already."

"Me?" said Mare, stunned.

"Yes, you ! who laugh at all her absurdities and think it funny !"

She was about to continue, raising her voice to a higher pitch in the silence. Very annoyed at being thus pecked at, Chiffon, her eyes shining and nose in the air as on battle days, proposed :

"Suppose we resume our conversation as before, instead of being so concerned with me?"

One of the hall doors giving access to the garden, was open. Without awaiting the outcome of her suggestion, she went out and down the few steps, to where Gribouille, her best friend, an enormous short and squat bulldog, was waiting for her. He was a good-natured dog with a ferocious appearance.

The night was clear but moonless, one of those nights full of moisture and perfume such as Coryse loved. Followed by Gribouille she went to the end of the garden. The intense odour of the petunias attracted her. When near the flower bed, which made a wan patch on the dark lawn, she bent over it, her nostrils distended, with a wild desire to roll over the fragrant flowers, the better to breathe their perfume. But she thought, "I would hurt them!"

For Chiffon, convinced that flowers can feel and suffer, touched them always with infinite care.

The sound of footsteps in the alley set Gribouille grunting, and at once she understood that M. d'Aubieres was coming forward in the darkness. He asked, vaguely discerning the lighter spot made by Chiffon :

"Is that you, mademoiselle Coryse?"

"Yes, monsieur."

In an uncertain voice he went on :

"Will you allow me to talk with you a while?"

"Certainly—"

"Is it—have they told you that. . . ."

She pitied him in his embarrassment.

"Yes, I know you have asked to marry me."

He whispered, his throat contracted :

“Well !”

“Well ! As you imagine, I was not expecting it, and sure, I am rather surprised, even very much surprised if you want me to tell the truth.”

“Why? Had you not guessed that I have loved you a long time?”

She frankly replied :

“Oh ! no ! Really not.”

“Yet it is true ! I have loved you since I met you.”

“That’s rather too much ! I am sure that the first time you saw me I cannot have made a pleasant impression on you. Oh ! No !”

“The first time !”

“Yes, at dinner,—that evening when I sat near you. What a nincompoop you must have thought me ! It is true that you had so badly bored me—with your hunts and papers—and all the rest.”

“But,” stammered the poor man, speechless “I did not know what to talk to you about,—and I—”

“Be sure I am thankful that you did not talk about military service—as you might have !

“How you mock at me ! Do you find me ridiculously tiresome?”

She promptly protested :

“Oh ! no ! not at all ! That, never ! and even, I like you very much, I feel very glad when I see you—”

Joyfully he asked :

“But, then—”

“When I see you, casually, but if it had to be always—”

“Then you do not want me?”

To this question Chiffon was inclined to reply, neatly : no ! That way it would have been all over, and never would the question be broached again. But she guessed so

much anxiety in the poor strangled voice that was questioning her, so much entreaty in the tall figure bent over her, that she failed to gather up enough courage to cause grievous pain to this friend who seemed to love her so dearly. In a kind tone she replied :

"No, I am not saying so, yet! I feel highly flattered, very grateful for your affection. But I am such a young girl! I have given so little thought to serious matters! Please allow me to think over it, will you? Do not ask me to say yes or no at once—as then, I would say no."

"I shall await your decision, but do allow me to plead my cause?"

Seeing that Coryse was turning back towards the house, he made her turn back again by taking her arm, gently.

"I beg of you to allow me still a few minutes, it is your mother who suggested me to meet you here."

"Ah! I thought so!"

And inwardly she added :

"She cannot leave me in peace!"

With his fine deep voice and greatly moved, M. d'Aubieres went on :

"I seem to you to be old, but I offer you a very young heart—a heart that I never gave to anybody."

"Oh!" said Coryse, scared, "you did not reach your age without ever loving some one, surely?"

He answered gravely :

"Loved, what I mean by 'loved,' never!"

"And what do you mean by love?"

"I mean : to give all my heart and all my life."

"But, is not that what one always mean by love?"

"Always,—well—no—that depends—" he stammered in his embarrassment.

"Listen,"—curtly retorted Chiffon—"I may as well tell you that I do not believe you! No, not in the least!"

"You do not believe me? Why?"

"Ah!" That is rather difficult to relate. Well, one day, in the spring, I was out riding with Uncle Mare, in Crisville forest—and I saw you at a distance, with a lady. I recognized you at once, there is no man so tall as you at Pont-sur-Sarthe. You were walking, and a carriage was following you, one of those ridiculous small hackney carriages from the place du Palais stand. The lady—it was one of those ladies whom one never mentions—except my mother and Madame de Bassigny who call them 'donzelles' (wench)—and step aside in the street to avoid grazing against them. One would think that would scold them. I beg your pardon for telling you all that about one whom you love—"

"Me?" protested the duke.

"Or one you loved, at least—"

Imperturbably, Chiffon continued:

"Then, I told Uncle Mare: 'Look! M. d'Aubieres with the lady whom one must never mention'—Oh! I forgot to tell you,—Paul de Lussy, Genevieve's brother, the one who is studying for the law, you know him—he had also done some stupid things on account of that lady and his people wanted him to enlist. Then Georgette Guibray, your general's daughter, had shown her to Genevieve, saying: 'You see, it's on account of her that your brother did all that nonsense' Genevieve had shown her to me too, and at breakfast I asked daddy some explanations—oh! Lord! What a commotion! I can still see it. My mother had arisen, she was abusing me with her napkin, calling me 'disgraceful girl!' I was blue over it,—I could not understand what had happened. And then, after breakfast, daddy took me to the smoking room and said I must never refer to that, especially in my mother's presence,—and that moreover one should ignore the fast women, who constitute a separate

society. And in the evening it all started again when I was going to bed. Dash it! That was one of the most beautiful reprimands I can remember! But all that only worries you?"

"No, I would only like to explain. . ."

"Wait till I have finished. Then I told Uncle Mère: 'There is M. d'Aubieres with the not-to-be mentioned lady.' And he replied: 'You don't know what you are talking about! You are short-sighted like a mole, and you cannot distinguish anything properly at such distance—' Then I suggested trotting out there to see—but he would not let me, and at the first footpath we meet—Crack! he pushes me into it so that I may no longer see the road,—and that was all for that time."

"I am going to—"

"It's not finished! A month later I was out with Jean—and I saw you once more with the same lady and nearly at the same place. Ah! I thought; this time, as I am not like my mother or Madame de Bassigny and am not afraid to scald myself, I am going to watch them at close range,—and I trotted off. 'Mamzelle Coryse,' said Jean, 'the road is getting very slippery,—the horses will surely bite the ground! I feel it would be better to turn back home.' I did not listen to him, but at that moment you were climbing back into the ridiculous cab and speeding down the road to Crisville. I said to Jean: 'I want to see where they are going.' And he replied: 'That, mademoiselle, is one of those things one must not do!'"

"And then?"

"Then I lost sight of you at a crossing, but I picked you up again all the same at the inn at Crisville. Your cab horse was eating oats, and you were standing at a window on the first floor—with the donzelle. Then I thought—" "You thought?"

“Since M. d’Aubieres hides in forests and inns with a woman alongside with whom he cannot show himself, it must be that he must absolutely see her all the same, he must be in love with her, just as Paul de Lussy loved her,—and even more! Otherwise he, a colonel, a serious and aged man would not risk—”

And as the duke made a movement :

“Yes, in comparison with Paul who is twenty-two you are old, are you not? Well, to do what, in Paul’s case are called stupid things, you must—”

“One gets terribly bored at Pont-sur-Sarthe, and may search for distractions. I cannot explain to you what you must not understand, but I can assert that, whatever you may have seen or heard of my stupid existence, I am worthy of loving you and of being your husband. Never, since the day I made your acquaintance, have I ever thought of giving my heart or my name to anybody, and I offer you, notwithstanding my ‘great age,’ a love very young and very pure.”

Squeezing the little arm that he had kept under his, he asked softly :

“Let me have a hope, I beg of you—”

“If I am not saying ‘yes’ at once,” said Coryse frankly, “it is because I shall only marry a man whom I will be loving, or that I feel I can love more than the others. So far I have only truly loved uncle and aunt de Launay, daddy, Uncle Mare, old Jean, my nurse, Gribouille and my flowers. I want to love my husband, if not with the love I am ignorant of, at least very tenderly, very surely.”

M. d’Aubieres had stopped. He took the child’s hands, and pressing them against his lips :

“I should be so horribly unhappy if I had to give you up !”

He was drawing her to himself, and she was not resisting, moved by that trembling voice, by all that tenderness which she felt to be so sincere.

"Chiffon," he whispered "my little Chiffon!"

She was resting on his shoulder, dreaming, wondering whether she could not love, some day, this man who loved her so much and seemed so kind.

But M. d'Aubieres, his mind gone topsyturvy at contact with this pliant body, yielding so confidently, intoxicated by the perfumes from the flowers at that hour of the night, completely lost his head. Roughly he enveloped Coryse in his arms, covering with mad kisses her hair and forehead. The girl disengaged herself violently, almost with horror. The duke, having recovered his senses, whispered, troubled and grieved over what he had done.

"Forgive me,—I love you so much!"

She answered simply, already recovered from a fright which, in her innocence, she could not explain:

"I also must ask your forgiveness—but, you see, I cannot bear being kissed."

IV

"HAVE you seen Chiffon this morning?" enquired M. de Bray of the Marquise as she came shortly before breakfast, to the library where he was talking with her brother.

"No—have you?"

"I met her at nine o'clock in the Rue des Benedictins," said Uncle Mare. "She was speeding along, followed by old Jean."

The Marquise, already angry, exclaimed :

"What ! out already without permission ?"

"Probably she was going to church for mass?" suggested M. de Bray, to appease her.

"To the mass? She never goes there ! Except on Sundays."

Mare, standing by the window, announced :

"She is coming back, she is in the yard with Luce—"

"Luce" was the Baronne de Givry, cousin german to M. de Bray. She entered the library, followed by Chiffon, who was marching in looking entirely unconcerned.

Not even wishing the young lady, the Marquise, threateningly, asked in that sharp squeaky voice which always made Coryse's eyes half-close :

"Where have you been ?"

"To Saint-Marcien."

"How is that? You who never go to a mass—?"

"Likewise, I did not attend mass."

"Then why did you go there?"

"To see the Abbe Chatel."

"Why?"

"Because I had something to tell him."

"Ah !" replied Madame de Bray, uneasily. "What was his answer to you?"

"Before asking what he answered I should perhaps say first what I asked him?"

Laughing, she added :

"But that would take too long !"

The Marquise spoke to Madame de Givry .

"Then, you two met at Abbe Chatel's confessional?"

"No," replied the young woman, somewhat embarrassed.

"The Abbe Chatel is no longer my confessor."

"Indeed !" exclaimed the surprised Marquis. "Is that possible? You, who would not move your finger without

asking him in what direction you should move it? You who were always talking to him, even too much, between you and me. What happened to you?"

Luce de Givry, tall, twenty-eight years old, bony and dark, devoid of any gracefulness, had a renown in Pont-sur-Sarthe for her austere, narrow and tiresome piety. She was tolerant however, that is to say that she never interfered or even took interest in what they did, or did not do, those who did not think or live as she did. Being rather active, she was at the same time doing charitable work and entertaining her friends, who, as very justly Mare de Bray used to say, repaid her with the blackest ingratitude, and yet she passionately loved both occupations. She was not unpleasant or unintelligent, but she displeased through certain stupid notions and, still more, by her entire lack of youth and charm. Women were embarrassed by her very real and very rigid virtue; men did not forgive her, her lack of gracefulness, and so Luce was only appreciated within her family where all loved her for her fine qualities and naïve goodness.

"Say again what you just told Pierre," asked Uncle Mare, pretending to be amazed.

Obediently Madame de Givry repeated:

"I do not confess to him any longer."

"You fell out?"

"We did not fall out—but he would not allow me any more."

"Since when?" queried Chiffon, also very surprised.

"Since my ball—the ball I gave at the time of the horse show."

"What did it do to him, your ball," said Mare "why should he meddle with such things?"

"Oh!" quickly protested Luce, "do not blame him, poor Abbe! The fault is mine. It is I who went, the evening

before the day of the ball, to ask his permission to give it—”

“And then?”

“Well, he said, ‘my child, such affairs do not concern me at all!’”

“He is a man with great sense.”

“I insisted, but he would not hear anything. He said, ‘Do not come to me, a priest, to ask permission to give an entertainment that the Church disapproves. I cannot encourage you in this direction.’”

“‘But my husband demands that we give this ball.’”

“‘Well, give your ball—and then you will come to tell me that you gave it,—and we will arrange—’. ‘I will not have the ball without your permission.’— ‘Truly, child, you place me in a ridiculous position!’”

“He was right, poor man!” said Mare de Bray laughingly.

“He is prejudiced!” declared the Marquise who approved of no priests except the Jesuits.

Coryse got angry, offended at their disparagement of the old Abbe, whom she liked very much.

“Prejudiced? Him! never! But really it is not his duty to encourage the Pont-sur-Sarthe people to kick about, is it?”

Then, turning to Madame de Givry:

“But, Luce, there is one thing I fail to understand in all that. Very often you go to balls—you always do! I thought you had been permitted to do it?”

“But I have been—”

“Then—”

“This is just what I told Abbe Chatei: ‘But since you allow me to go to balls?’ and he replied: ‘my child, this has nothing to do with it,—a ball is a place where one is more exposed to sinning than in many others.’”

“Ah!” said Chiffon, pensively.

“Well, when you give a ball, you encourage, you facilitate in a way, the hatching of sin, and to some extent you have a responsibility in it, a complicity. When on the contrary you go to a ball, I authorise you in full security to go to it because I am sure that you will never commit a sin there nor will you be for any one else an occasion to sin.’ You may think it funny?” proceeded Madame de Givry, turning towards Mare who was bursting with laughter in his arm-chair. “But I, I was dismayed! All my invitations had been sent, and only two days were left! I came back home and told Hubert and mother that we would not give the ball, because Abbe Chatel had refused me his permission.”

“They must have made funny faces!” asked Coryse, who was laughing also.

“You bet! mother said I had been a fool to refer to the Abbe. As for Hubert, he was furious! He shouted to me: ‘Well, let it be so! We will not give this ball, but since, now that we are no longer in mourning I am not going to receive courtesies without returning them, we shall go nowhere, you hear me! Absolutely nowhere! But what about you?’ I was in despair, and then, God pitied me, and inspired in me the idea of consulting good Father Ragon—”

“Ah!” said Coryse, with a grimace:

“And Father Ragon was charming. He told me, when I mentioned Abbe Chatel’s prohibition—”

“So,” exclaimed Chiffon, “it has become a prohibition?”

“When I explained to him the object of my visit, he replied: ‘What does the Gospel say, my child?—the wife owes obedience to her husband. Your husband wants you to give a ball—well, give a ball,—God will want you to.’”

Coryse protested:

"What an idea, that: to mix God with all that! Is it not ridiculous to burden Him with such things!"

"I was awfully pleased," resumed Madame de Givry, and related to him that I had confessed to Father Ragon, and that I had the permission. He asked me: "Then, my child, you are satisfied with Father Ragon?" Well, I did not dare to show myself enraptured of him, or even to say all the good I thought of him, I was afraid it would hurt Abbe Chatel, so I merely replied 'yes' as I did not want to lie. Then he entreated me: "Well, go back to him! Yes, that will delight me—as I have never known anyone who was such a bother at confession!". He said 'bother,' can you believe it?"

"He learnt that from me!", exclaimed Coryse with a laugh. "That poor Abbe—so good . . . and so funny!"

"You know, Luce," remarked Mare de Bray, "you will be well advised not to tell this story—"

"Why?" asked ingenuously Madame de Givry.

"Because it would make you appear ridiculous—and the Abbe too." He added this thinking that the fear of harming her old confessor would more surely close her mouth than the fear of harming herself.

The Marquise exclaimed:

"Abbe Chatel is of the common people! He cannot understand anything! He has no delicacy, no sentiment or knowledge of worldly affairs. Naturally, he is the man Coryse picked for her confessor!"

"He is not my confessor," retorted Chiffon, "at least he is no longer—"

"Since when, pray?"

"Since three or four years,—since nobody looks after me and I go out alone with Jean.—since my first communion."

"Ah!" said Madame de Bray, speechless at seeing herself so ignorant of her daughter's going and comings. "And

yet, you are continually at his house. What do you do there if he is not your confessor?"

"He is my confidant, I like him very much and I believe him safe and straightforward, I relate to him all my little affairs, those I think I ought to tell him."

"Then," queried the vexed Marquise, "to who do you confess now-a-days?"

"To nobody—"

And, as her mother was making a movement:

"Or to everybody, whichever you like. Sometimes I go to one, another time to another,—at Saint Marcien, the Cathedral, the Chapelle-neuve, Notre-Dame-du-Lys—I go round all the parishes, there are many! I confess about six times a year. It may go on so for a time, and when the round is finished I will begin it all again."

"This girl is mad! Absolutely mad!" said the Marquise, with a grieved air. "She goes right and left, instead of choosing an intelligent preceptor—"

"A preceptor! Well that's just what I don't want!" tersely declared Chiffon. "I do whatever I believe I ought to do, but I do it as I understand it. It is prescribed to confess, but it has not been ordered that one must initiate to his life, to accustom to one's daily thoughts and faults somebody who knows you and meets you outside the church! All that is obnoxious to me,—those exterior and divine relations all mixed up, as a salad, I find it all grotesque and repulsive."

"That's absurd," said the Marquise. "Then, if so, one should not even consult a doctor, in fear of meeting him outside of his visits—"

"That is irrelevant—"

"On the contrary it is the same thing. To the one the soul is shown, to the other the body, which is far worse!"

"Well, the fact is, that if I had got to show one or the

other I would more willingly my body than my soul!"

"Shut up!" exclaimed Madame de Bray, rising and stretching her arm out in one of those gestures that she had seen in dramas and particularly loved. "Shut up! You are a horrible creature, a girl without pudicity!"

Unmoved, Coryse replied:

"Or, rather, I understand differently pud--no! that's funny I can never make up my mind to use the word—it looks so ugly! Well, I understand modesty otherwise, probably."

"Keep quiet! I adjure you to stop!"

The word "adjure" having brought a humorous smile on Uncle Mare's kind and frank face, his sister-in-law's fury swerved against him.

"Really, I advise you to laugh! It suits you well! You who are partly responsible for Corysande's tone and behaviour!"

And as, in accordance with his habit, Mare de Bray did not say a word in reply, the Marquise further lost her temper:

"Yes! It makes no difference if you say no! It is on account of you that I can obtain nothing from this child. I am well aware that she has a bad nature, but--"

"I am going, so you may enjoy your breakfast," exclaimed Madame de Givry, hurrying to leave before the scene she anticipated.

And timidly, half turning towards Coryse to whom, in her dream of Madame de Bray she did not dare to address openly, she softly added:

"I feel very sorry, I am afraid it is a little my fault—it is I who spoke of the Abbe Chatel, and then, it brought out all the rest."

"Bah!" impertinently replied Chiffon, looking at her mother, "the rest always comes, you are not needed for it."

She was going to slip away behind her cousin, but the Marquise called her back in a voice that anger caused to squeak more than ever :

"Stay ! I want to speak to you !"

Without a word, Chiffon came back and sat down.

"Well, what reply must we give M. d'Aubieres?"

"None, I will reply to him myself," her daughter answered.

"But I am your mother, and have a right, I suppose, to know your reply?"

"Certainly. I cannot make up my mind to marry M. d'Aubieres. I am sorry for it, as I like him very much."

"But it is madness ! never will you again find such. . . ."

"I repeat to you that it would be very bad of me to say : yes, reluctantly. I have duly thought over it, and I am absolutely determined—"

"It is the Abbe Chatel who prompted this to you?"

"The Abbe Chatel, to whom I explained all my thoughts, approves of them but he never prompted me. On the contrary he was advising me to wait further, before taking a decision, until the moment when I related—"

For a while the Marquise had been thinking, without listening to her daughter. Suddenly, by one of those about turns that were usual with her, she made herself pathetic and tender :

"Corysande ! my darling daughter ! I have none but you in the world ! You are my only love ! My only joy ! I have never lived except for you !"

However used she was to her mother's lyric cries, Chiffon always felt vaguely surprised in presence of this formidable impudence which, in spite of herself, disconcerted her. She was listening, her mouth open, her eyes glistening, her lips trembling preceding an outburst of laughter. She bent her head, afraid to burst out if she glanced at the face of the

Marquis or the mocking look on Uncle Mare's, and gave no reply.

The Marquise went on :

"You have always been deeply ungrateful, I know, and I will not try to improve you. Therefore I cannot hope that you may do anything for me or anyone else, but it is in view of your own interests that I beg you to think again, and not lightly come to any decision."

"I am not taking it lightly at all," gravely replied Chiffon.

"You are taking it without consulting anybody."

"I did, and all those I consulted replied that I, in such case, should take nobody's advice but my own."

The Marquise joined her hands and, tragically :

"For the last time I entreat you to wait before replying, and to ask enlightened people--Father de Ragon, for instance!"

"Crash! 'Here we are!'" said Coryse, partly laughing and partly angry. "Do you think he will find a subtle combination,—like that of Luce's ball?"

"Do you want me to kneel before you?"

"No, thank you, I don't want it! Nothing so absurd. I will see Father de Ragon whenever you like! What do I care? Only it was easier to him to pass off the affair of Luce with God than that of me with M. d'Aubieres!"

"Promise me that you will go to see Father de Ragon to-day."

"I promise."

"And that you will listen to his advice?"

"I will listen to it, but that does not mean, of course, that I shall follow it."

"What did you tell him yesterday?"

"Tell whom?"

"M. d'Aubieres?"

"I told him the truth, that I like him very much, but not

enough to marry him, but that I will think over his proposal."

"And him?"

"What do you mean—him?"

"What did he tell you?"

"He, he kissed me—and it was very unpleasant!"

"That's because it was the first time, it made you feel shy."

"If no, it did not make me feel shy at all. It upset me terribly, that's all, and the proof that I did not get shy is that I told him the effect he produced on me, so—"

"Poor Aubieres!" whispered Uncle Mare with a laugh.

A servant announced:

"Madame la Marquise is served,"—which meant: "breakfast is ready."

Directly after dinner, while Coryse was serving the coffee, Madame de Bray left the library furtively.

"Ah!" said Coryse, noticing this flight, "she is going to school him! It's a waste of time. To begin, I have a horror of Father de Ragon, with his cunning look and his stretched smile like those of an old coquette who wants to hide her false teeth—"

Gentle as ever, the Marquis advised:

"You must not dislike people without even knowing why—"

"But I do know why."

"Ah! And the reason is—"

"That I do not esteem him."

Uncle Mare and the Marquis laughed. The way Chiffon declared that she "did esteem" that very intelligent and powerful man, who guided all the women and most of the men of Pont-sur-Sarthe, seemed to them surprisingly comical.

The girl blushed.

"You are laughing at me? I can see it. 'Esteem' is ridiculous, old-fashioned! It's common! All the same, I know no other word to express what I feel."

M. de Bray protested:

"No, my little Chiffon, nobody is making fun of you. And now that we are by ourselves, tell us what the Abbe Chatel told you."

"It's rather I who told him something."

"What?"

"Yesterday evening's affair."

"The marriage proposal?"

"No. M. d'Aubieres' kiss."

"Ah! All right. I did not know you called that 'the affair'!"

"Of course! That was important for me, because at the moment M. d'Aubieres did it I was nearly leaning towards 'yes.' A little more and it was done! But it made everything crash down."

"Why?"

"Because it felt horrible, I tell you! And as I imagine that a wife must allow her husband such advances whenever he wishes—I cannot make up my mind with that in perspective. I cannot!"

"You told that to the Abbe?" asked Marc, highly amused.

"Certainly."

"And how did you put it?"

"I told him: 'Monsieur l'abbe, M. d'Aubieres asked to marry me, etc. At home they expected me to say: yes.'"

"Allow me," quickly interrupted M. de Bray. "I never wanted you to—"

"He understood all right that it was not you! When I say 'they' he knows very well to whom I refer. Then I asked him what he advised me to do, and he replied: 'My dear little friend, since your parents desire

this marriage it only remains for you to consult your heart and your reason, they will tell you much better than I what you should reply, I said :

"My reason replies : 'yes, undoubtedly' and my heart nearly said yes. But there you are ! M. d'Aubiere kissed me under the trees, I tried to explain as best I could the effect it produced on me,—but he, Abbe Chatel, cut me off at once. 'This is enough, my dear child it's enough, I need not hear more.' Why do you laugh, Uncle Mare?"

"Because your tales are grotesque to the poor Abbe, who is not at all fit to listen to such details."

"But on the contrary, he is there for that ! And I was keen on explaining to him the strange phenomenon that occurred in me at that time."

"You were keen on telling him?"

"Yes, I told him that I never experienced anything like it—not even on New Year's Day when I am obliged to kiss some rather disgusting people."

"And why did you tell the Abbe Chatel that you kissed some disgusting people on New Year's Day?" asked the surprised M. de Bray.

"But because that is true ! Madame de Charville, to begin with, who always kisses me through her wet veil—and cousin 'la Balue then ! Do you think he is appetising, cousin 'la Balue?' He has no wet veil but he dribbles on you, which is as bad. Well, I think I still prefer that to M. d'Aubiere's last evening—"

"You are not serious?"

"Not serious? Well, if you think I am joking you are badly mistaken, that's all ! I am not feeling inclined to, be sure of it."

Suddenly she asked :

"What time is it?"

"Two o'clock."

"What! Already? I must be off, since I promised to call on Fâther de Ragon!"

"You have plenty of time, I believe he only goes to his confessional at four o'clock."

"But I am not going to his confessional! I will see him in his parlour. At his confessional it would take too long to wait."

She slipped out of the library, and they heard her clear voice calling old Jean.

Now serious, Uncle Mare asserted:

"Whether our Chiffon marries Aubierès or another, when she has gone we shall miss her badly!"

V

It was nearly three o'clock when Chiffon arrived at the Jesuits' house. A storm was threatening which darkened the sky and rendered the atmosphere stifling.

"Stay in the garden if you want to," said she to old Jean, who was entering the parlour and looking around cautiously, "it will be more amusing for you."

He answered, hesitatingly:

"And if it should rain?"

"Well, if it should rain you may come in, but why are you walking in such a way? One would think you are afraid to fall through a trap door—"

"I am not afraid, but I feel rather uneasy here. It seems to me that the walls are listening—and it makes me shiver,—then, there is also this damned flooring—"

"That's it! Swear now! It will sound nice in this house!"

"But I keep slipping!—Dash! now it's the carpets!"

"Naturally! If you will try to skate—"

Pushing out the old servant who was slipping on the

waxed floor, and on the small carpets laid about in the large room, she said with a laugh :

“Go ! get out ! You would end in breaking something !”

When he had gone, Chiffon walked up and down the parlour which she was seeing for the first time. Of the new and elegant dwelling just built by the Jesuits of Pont-sur-Sarthe she only knew the chapel where she came against her wish, brought here by her mother for smart services. Madame de Bray considered that the Jesuits are not only useful people to know but that it is well to be seen in their houses. All the smart set,—including the young people, too—were eager to attend their services, where the society people who possessed fine voices used to sing, and the gallery of the Father’s chapel had seen many marriages and flirtations hatched there.

Coryse, who at first disliked those meetings which wearied her, had afterwards taken interest in the petty plots that were woven under her eyes. She knew every little rivalry, religious or worldly, that existed there. She knew that a certain Father, being more in demand, was a cause of vexation among the others, over his success. She knew that certain penitents, being elegant and well established, were allowed at any time in those confessionals which were only open during regulation hours to other less well-to-do.

While awaiting Father de Ragon,—the most popular of the worldly fathers—who was taking long to come, Chiffon compared this pleasant building which, under an appearance of severity, dissimulated real comfort, with the dirty shanty in which the cathedral’s cure and his three vicars were humbly housed. She was thinking, with her childish commonsense, that while the “society” people knew well the way to the former place, the poor knew, still much better, the way to the latter. It seemed to her that while the large sums of money that came here through legacies, donations

and collections might never get out of it, the scanty alms obtained with such trouble only went through the small grey house there!

Chiffon had an instinctive dislike for those who hoarded. That word "economize" that she heard all around her, uttered with the respect it inspires in rural places, seemed to her hateful and repulsive, and she thought that in this fine house, just built, they must be economizing greatly and give little, to the poor at least. She was looking, while walking up and down, at the peep-holes open in these white walls, which reminded her of cashier's offices in banks. And the Jesuits who, now and again, swiftly crossed the long room with gliding and short steps, appeared, so she thought, more like clerks than religious men. In this convent everything seemed to speak of the world and but little of God.

After a while Coryse lost patience :

"Well, I am not going to wait for ever here ! It will soon be four o'clock ! I have to attend to my course !"

She went near the window and saw, in the large garden, Jean asleep on a bench. At first, correctly sitting up as in his driving seat, the old coachman was now softly sinking down, benumbed by the cold air, his legs stretched out, his body limp, his head bent. And the Fathers who, from time to time, were passing on their way to the chapel, were turning their refined faces, uneasily, towards the old man who was sleeping in the vulgar attitude of a drunken man. Their dumb indignation immensely amused the girl, and she was not in the least bored now, when a voice, very dry but also very soft, made her look behind.

"It is you who came, my child? But I cannot hear you at present."

"Ah !" said Chiffon. "I thought my mother had asked you whether I could come and see you?"

Going towards the door she added, amiably, but as if relieved :

"Well, if you cannot, I will go."

Father de Ragon stopped her with a sign :

"I cannot see you here--"

"I ask your pardon, it is my mother who--"

"Yes, your mother knows that sometime I receive her in the parlour—but what I can do for her, I regret to say, I cannot do for you."

As Coryse was not replying, he went on, still in the same clear voice :

"Your mother told me that you wished to consult me about a very serious matter?"

"Oh! I want!—that is to say, she wants me to—"

"Well, I shall hear you by and by at my confessional—"

"But," protested Chiffon "I did not come to confess!"

"Never mind! my penitents are already awaiting me, I cannot tarry any longer."

Coryse, flabbergasted, had a mental glimpse of a long wait in the new, the terribly new chapel, where gold flashed, grating against the crude green of the decorations on the wall borders, that chapel where one's eye found nothing soft and peaceful to rest on, where, in the midst of low whisperings and the rustlings of skirts, one could not collect one's thoughts, and pray. And the fear of that wait suggested her this thought, which would perhaps allow her to get free :

"Very well,—I shall wait in the chapel! One does not get dull there, all those ladies speak so loudly!

The Father suddenly appeared to change his mind. He said, as though he had heard nothing :

"Let us see—since you seem to desire it, I could hear you here."

And, changing his voice he proceeded in a dull, lifeless tone:

"I am listening, my daughter—what is it you wish to tell me?"

She answered deliberately.

"Me? nothing at all! I thought it was you who had something to tell me?"

Better used to defending himself than to attacking, Father de Ragon hesitated an instant, then made up his mind:

"Your mother told me that the Duc d'Aubieres wants to marry you,—and that you seemed to hear it with—shall I say repugnance?"

"Oh! You can say it, rather!"

Never had the Jesuit addressed Chiffon, when she accompanied Madame de Bray, except with a few commonplace words of welcome to which she used to reply in monosyllables. Such freedom in her speech, to which he was not accustomed, puzzled him.

There was a short silence.

"Well?" questioned Coryse.

"Well," resumed Father de Ragon, decidedly put out by these questions, "that proposal, which would be flattering to any girl is, for you, not only flattering but above anything you should hope for. You possess no fortune—"

"I know it!"

"The Duc d'Aubieres, without being rich, finds that he is rich enough for two. He is giving, when asking for your hand, a fine example of disinterestedness."

"I know this also?—and I am very grateful to M. d'Aubieres whom I like very much besides."

"You like him?"

"With all my heart. He is certainly the one I like best among all those who visit our house."

"But then I do not understand why you—"

"What! You do not understand! Yet it seems to me to be simple enough! I like M. d'Aubieres in the same way I like Madame de Jarville, for instance, or Abbe Chatel, but not to marry them. Good heavens. . . No!"

"My dear child, I see that you do not know what marriage means."

"Sure, I don't! But still I have some notion of it, one can always picture things to oneself, is it not so? Well, when I marry I want to love my husband otherwise than I love M. d'Aubieres or the Abbe Chatel,—so there you are!"

"You are somewhat sentimental, like all young girls—"

"Me?" exclaimed Chiffon, indignantly. "There is not a scrap of sentiment in me!"

Reflecting, and a little troubled in spite of herself, she corrected:

—"except perhaps for flowers, and the sky, and the rivers. It is true that I love enough to lie on the ground and muse before all that. Well, let us say that I have sentiment for things, and even for animals, if you will, but not for people? Ah! surely not! I am not sentimental!"

Positively stupefied in hearing all this, Father de Ragon asked, with a smile of condescending scorn at the corners of his well curved and very thin lips:

"Who is it who educated you, my child?"

Without appearing to perceive his irony she answered:

"Now it is Daddy and Uncle Mare. Before them, it was my uncle and aunt de Launay."

And as the Jesuit, collecting his memories, repeated: "de Launay?"—Chiffon added, laughing:

"Oh! Don't try! They don't visit you! They are not of the sort who do! They are old people, peaceful and not 'chic!' Not at all in the swim,—They go to their parish church! But, I beg your pardon! You were saying when I interrupted you, that I was sentimental, and it is on this

account that I interrupted you—”

“I was telling you that young girls are more or less smitten with ideals—ideals forged out by themselves, which they never meet.”

“I am not smitten with any ideal—”

“That is a good thing! for, then, you can consider freely and in full possession of yourself the fine future that is opening out before you if you marry the Duc d’Aubieres?”

“Where is it, the fine future? I, who could never bear the idea of marrying a military man!—Yes I have a horror for them—the military! I mean the officers of course, because the soldiers—it is not their fault, poor men! And how I pity them, on the contrary! And how I like them over it! I can’t meet one on a hot day without feeling inclined to give him something to drink at home, so—”

Father de Ragon was considering Chiffon with affright, and he thought that Madame de Bray was quite right when saying that her daughter was “not like other people.” He resumed, further exaggerating his cold mien and his perfect correctness:

“Really, my child, you are speaking a singular language!”

Very sincerely and gently, Coryse excused herself:

“Yes, I know it! It’s quite true! But I can’t help it! It is instinctive to me! I beg your pardon—I understand well that it must be shocking you. As it shocks the Abbe Chatel, all the more reason why you—”

And, looking squarely at him, she concluded:

“The fact is, you see, you are a man of the world and I am not!”

“Well,” said the Jesuit, who could not help laughing.

“Are you disposed, my child, to reflect before refusing this marriage,—to listen to my advice?”

“Reflecting would be of no use. To begin with, when I try to reflect I fall asleep. Then the more I reflected the

more I would say : ' no !—So there will be no advantage in reflecting. As for following your advice, if I may speak to you candidly ”

“Please do—”

“Well, I do not see why I should follow your advice. You do not know me—you never saw so much of me before,—everything in me must be displeasing to you—”

Seeing the Jesuit begin a gesture of protestation :

“Yes ! Yes ! I can realize it ! I displease you, and you have no reason to take an interest in me. Whatever you told me, it was because my mother asked you to do so.”

“I told it to you because it is my opinion.”

“May be so But confess that it is your opinion because my mother explained to you that, without money, I can only make a poor marriage, while this one is beneficial. So, under the pretext that I am not rich, you advise me to marry a man whom I will never be able to love, or at least not as I want to love the one with whom I shall spend all my life—”

“My child, you are mistaken—it is because the Duc d'Aubieres is a perfectly honourable and well-born man,—perfectly good also, that I advise you to marry him. I would give you the same advice if you were very rich.”

“Go on ! never ! In the first place, if I were very rich you would instead of goading me to marry d'Aubieres keep me in reserve for—”

As she stopped, Father de Ragon enquired :

“I would keep you for whom?”

“For any ex-student of yours who happened to be poor, or who had gambled,—or anything of this sort.

“I have noticed how things happen in Pont-sur-Sarthe since I began to see what occurs around me,—and I rejoice in possessing no money ! Oh ! As to that, you know how to help your own ! You are not quitters !”

· Afraid that she might have gone too far, Chiffon raised her eyes to the Jesuit. His refined and serious face, on the contrary, had softened :

"Well," said he, with a kind look, "it seems to me, from what I gather, that those who are not 'quitters' as you call them, find favour with you? You must like the man who helps others—"

"Yes, in the case of an individual, no, if it is a corporation."

Father de Ragon remained surprised, looking at Chiffon without a word.

Since he had lived at Pont-sur-Sarthe, this sixteen years old girl was the first "thinking" person he had met.

"Then you read much?"

"No, not much."

"Then you think a great deal over serious matters?"

"Sometimes, when riding,—yes, it is especially when I am on horseback that I think,—as I could not fall asleep in thinking, then I reflect, but it is involuntary."

"And,—the outcome of these reflections is that you do not like our order?"

"The fact is,—well, it does not look to me like an order, not a religious order, I mean. The Dominicans, Marists, Capuchins, Oratorians, etc., I call them orders, they mind God only, they preach, they only do what I understand the religious ought to do. But you, you just make me the impression of any organisation. You are so busy with marriages, politics, that. . . well, I am afraid of you ! And yet, God knows I am not afraid of many things."

"I assure you, my child, that we only work for the welfare of humanity and its salvation—"

"Its welfare, on earth, I am convinced of it. Its salvation? I do not think it interests you very much. And then, according to your ideas, humanity means the worldly

people, just like my mother thinks,—I know that !”

“I see that you are definitely prejudiced against us. You are quite wrong, my dear child.”

“Oh !” politely affirmed Chiffon, “not more against you than against the freemasons, for instance,—or the polytechnicians who follow up their monomania through all their lives. I loathe generally all those who collect together to fall upon the isolated people.”

“This loathing may carry one far—”

“Very far ! So, when quite small, I was going with my maid on some errands, and I heard the small shopkeepers of by-streets complain, almost weep,—while relating that since the large establishments of the Rue des Benedictins and the Place Carnot had been opened, they could do no business,—when I saw one after the other, old shops closing up, when I heard that such or such supplier had become insolvent, I was raging against those enormous shops that were smashing all the small ones,—and many times, in the evening, when saying my prayers, I cried to God as hard as I could, that it would be a great idea if He swept away all one night.”

“But that is an abominable thought !”

“Quite possibly ! I do not dispute it ! I had that thought, that’s all ! I was not telling it to uncle Albert and aunt Mathilde, as you may imagine ! With them it would not have passed. Oh ! no ! I never communicated those ideas to anybody then—”

“And not now either, I hope ?”

“Oh ! Yes ! I tell all this to Abbe Chatel, and to Uncle Mare—”

“Ah ! This is true,” said the Jesuit with a stretched out smile. “M. le Vicomte de Bray is a socialist or, at least, he presented himself as such at the last elections ?”

“No”, replied Chiffon sharply, “You are mistaken ! M.

de Bray who is really a socialist did not bear upon that to try to be elected. He presented himself without any political label—

"And he failed—"

It was the candidate presented by the Fathers who had been elected. Chiffon replied :

"Yes, too much money was wanted to secure an election."

Then, rising without awaiting the invitation of the Jesuit, who had lost consciousness of other things while listening to this, to him, strange modern product, so different from all he had known so far, she added, a little mockingly :

"But I cannot detain you any longer! You were in a hurry, remember, and there are all those ladies, who must be stamping their feet in the chapel."

Father de Ragon also rose. As Coryse was stepping aside to let him pass out first :

"No" said she, very courteously, and with a smile, "you are no longer a little girl, and soon you will be 'Madame la Duchesse.' "

"That will surprise me!" said Chiffon, shaking her loose hair which undulated down to her hips. "I have not the head for the job."

Father Ragon asked :

"I see nobody in the lodge. Surely you did not come here alone?"

"Oh ! no ! I have not been brought up like an American ! I have my nurse!"

She indicated old Jean, who was still sleeping on his bench, although collapsed almost to the ground :

"He is not decorative, my nurse!"

After passing through the gate she turned, and, looking back, saw the time by the chapel's big clock, and whispered with a laugh :

"Half past five ! I made them all wait. I made them all wait."

VI

THEY were having dinner when Madame de Bray entered the dining room. Long since they had given up, waiting for her. Very seldom did she arrive in time, and generally excused herself on the ground of errands, visits, stopped clocks, and if necessary even driving accidents. As soon as she sat down she enquired from Coryse with an astonishingly amiable air :

"Well? Are you satisfied with Father de Ragon?"

"Oh! Very satisfied!" She replied unconcernedly.

After a moment's reflection she added :

"But I do not know whether he was satisfied with me."

"What did you tell him?" asked M. de Bray, vaguely uneasy.

"Many things—the conversation turned. . . ."

"I will see him to-morrow morning," said the Marquise, less amiable, "and he will tell me what went on."

"But," peacefully remarked Chiffon, "I also can tell it to you,—and, first of all, nothing happened."

"Ah! This is surprising!"

"And why is it surprising?"

"Because you look embarrassed."

"Never! Why should I look embarrassed?"

"I don't know?"

"Nor do I! I was requested to have a talk with Father de Ragon,—I called on him,—we chatted,—and there you are!"

"And he had nothing disagreeable to say?"

"Certainly not, he has good manners, too good rather! Me too, but not too good! but still, sufficiently,—no! I don't believe he approved anything I told him, and I am sure

that nothing he told me convinced me,—but, apart from that, ‘we are the same as before—’

“Then,” demanded Madame de Bray, taking advantage of the servant’s exit from the room, “you have not yet decided to marry the Duc d’Aubieres?”

“I have decided not to marry him.”

And, turning towards Uncle Mare :

“I shall give him my reply this evening, since you say he will come?”

“No,” exclaimed the exasperated Marquise. “you shall not give him your reply to-night ! It is madness to refuse him so without thinking over it !

“But I *have* thought over it ! I have done nothing else, since yesterday. I have thought enough to die of it !”

“You shall wait before giving a definite reply to the Duc d’Aubieres—”

“Wait for what ? No—I will not leave him in doubt any longer, it has already lasted long enough—”

“I forbid you to speak to him to-day !” said the Marquise, imperiously, as she rose.

Seeing that, instead of going to the drawing room, Chiffon was going up the stairs, she asked :

“Well, where are you going to?”

“To my room—”

“You shall stay here.”

The girl blushed and tersely replied :

“I don’t care ! If I stay I shall speak to M. d’Aubieres as I should, I’ll tell him that I am quite determined never to marry him, never !”

“You are mad !”

“You have been telling me so for so long already—”

“Here he is !” suddenly exclaimed the Marquise, pointing to the ringing bell.

“Ah ! all for the best !” sighed Chiffon, “I badly want to

get that weight off my chest !”

She went to meet the colonel, unembarrassed.

“Monsieur d’Aubieres, I wish to speak to you. Will you come with me to the garden, like yesterday evening?”

And stepping down the stairs, and smiling, she added in a whisper :

“But without kissing me—”

He followed her obediently, deeply moved, clear-sighted notwithstanding his love, and guessing all she had to tell him. Before she began to speak he asked, in a touching voice :

“It is to tell me that you will not?”

“Yes,” stammered Chiffon, deeply sorry to have to cause him this grief. “I have thought very, very much since yesterday,—and have understood that I cannot marry you. Yet I am very fond of you ! I like you with all my heart, but it is better to tell such things, before and not after, is it not so ?

He gave no reply. She could not see him in the dark, but she guessed him to be so unhappy that she felt very sad.

“I beg of you,” she entreated, softly placing her hand on his arm, “do not grieve so badly over it. I am not worth it, to begin with ! I am bad-tempered, ignorant, ill-mannered, I possess ‘all the vices of the Avesnes,’ says my mother ! And then, I am unfit to be a colonel’s wife ! Or to be society lady, in any way, I will never know how to talk or to entertain, or show a pleasant face to the people I dislike, or convince idiots that I find them witty. There is in me nothing of a woman,—I am a young savage, only made to live with flowers or animals—”

Suddenly anxious, she asked, in a different tone :

“Talking about animals, where is Gribouille ? I have not seen him since breakfast. Has anybody lost him ?”

She ran out, through the lawn, towards the stables. An

Instant later she returned, still running, followed by Gribouille, who was jumping to her shoulders.

"Excuse me," said she, panting, "excuse me for leaving you so! I am so much afraid about Gribouille! All the same I ought not to have,—in the middle of a serious conversation—Well, you see, that's just like me!"

As the duke was not replying, she asked, her eyes searching the darkness:

"Are you no longer there?"

He had sat down near the path on a sort of small hillock. Chiffon coming near him, understood that he was crying.

"What!" said he, violently stirred, "what! You are crying!"

The thought that this man, who was in her eyes nearly a giant, and nearly an old man, could cry, could possibly cry, had never occurred to her. Stupefied and entirely upset, she sat near him.

"My God!" she said, ready to weep also, "my God!"

She found nothing else to say. She was losing her head. She considered herself horribly wicked and stupid, in so tormenting this kind man, who was softly sobbing close to her.

The idea that someone could suffer through her, on account of her, was obnoxious to Coryse. She would have preferred a thousand times to suffer herself. Abruptly she told herself:

"Well! So much the worse! I am going to admit to him what is passing through my brain,—and then, afterwards, if he should want me all the same, well, I will marry him."

"Listen to me," she said, with her rather sonorous voice which so deeply moved the duke. "Listen well to me—and understand me if, however, you can, as I will try my best, but perhaps it will not be quite clear. But it is so diffi-

cult to say it all ! And if we were in the sunshine instead of in the dark, if I could see your face, and you mine, I would never dare, never ! never !—But first of all, I beg of you, do not cry so, it is dreadful !”

And as, silently, he was still crying, she fell down on her knees :

“I beseech you.”

She passed her arm round his neck and, kissing affectionately his wet cheek she repeated, in an infinitely entreating voice :

“I beg of you, since I am telling you that I will do anything you wish,—all !”

Forgetful of the evening before, she was pressing herself near to him. He pushed her back, almost roughly :

“No,—no,—move away !”

Surprised at first, Chiffon got up, sadly whispering :

“Ah !—yes,—I see ! You act as I did yesterday !”

Shyly, she silently sat down again near the duke. He went on, still trembling :

“No, no, do not believe that, my little Coryse. The fact is you cannot understand me. I feel nervous, unhappy, and no longer know what I am doing or saying. I had dreamt such a lovely dream, and have fallen down from so high !”

Anxious, she asked :

“If you had such a lovely dream, it is not my fault, at least ? I mean it's not that I induced you to believe that I wanted to marry you ? I did not try to make you love me otherwise than as a good child ? Is it not so ?”

“No, certainly.”

“That's better ! If I had done that, without meaning to, of course,—I would now be in despair, truly ! I find that, showing by one's looks or expressions that people please you, or that you wish to please them, when, on the con-

trary, one does not care for them at all, is abominable. Yes, abominable!"

After a silence she went on:

"That's what I see going on all the time around me—and never will I do it."

"You were saying, a little while ago," said the duke who was regaining his composure, "that you were going to explain to me why you do not want to be my wife?"

"Yes, and it makes me feel shy to do so. Of life I only know what I guess, and it's not much! But, at least, I hear conversations,—people speak in whispers,—they bring certain names together,—and when there are balls at home I see many little flirtations,—many little happenings that are not right. I do not mean the young girls, as young girls may do anything they like, there is no harm in it, is there, since they are not married? No, I mean the ladies, some of them deceive their husbands, and,—deceiving one's husband, I don't know just where it begins or where it ends, but I find it must be very bad!"

"It is bad, undoubtedly!"

"Well, there you are! I am sure that, if I married you, I would deceive you."

"But," stammered he, puzzled, "why are you so sure of that?"

"Sure,—at least as much as one can be of such things! You see so far I never met any man of whom I thought: 'This one, I would like to marry him!'"

"And then?"

"Then if, after we were married, I came to tell myself, one day seeing a certain gentleman pass by: 'Hullo! I wish I had married this one!' Think of it! What a blow! It would be a disaster!"

Despite his grief, the duke wanted to laugh. But he answered, gravely:

"What you tell me happens to many wives."

"And then?"

"Then, instead of allowing their thoughts to bear on the newcomer they rested on their husbands,—and when the husbands are kind, as I will be—"

"I am sure of that!" Chiffon said with conviction, "but do you think it is enough to be a kind husband when one has not got a good wife?"

"And why should you not be a good wife, honest and good?"

"I would be so, as long as I did not meet—"

"What?"

"The man I will probably never meet, but who will certainly not be you—"

And as M. d'Aubieres was moving about, she promptly added :

"Yes, I love you, I have already told you, so, but I believe I do not love you at all, not at all, the way a woman must love her husband, and I feel certain that, the day I would meet the man I would love so,—I would let myself go! Would it not be much worse if I married you without telling this to you? If now that you know the reason why I could not say yes to you, you still want me, at least you have been forewarned, and will not be able to reproach me with anything—. When I say: nothing to reproach me, that's in a way, I mean, because, after all, I quite realize it will not please you. But at least I shall not have been sly, or dissimulating. Do you understand?"

"I understand," softly replied M. d'Aubieres, "that you would be very unhappy with me, and it would make me miserable to see you unhappy. Therefore I must give up what was for me, for the past six months, all my joy and hope. You have, very delicately, and very picturesquely,

made me understand that I am an old fool."

"Are you angry with me?" said Coryse. "I am sure you are angry with me."

"No, I swear to you I am not," muttered the poor man, strangled by emotion.

He tried to rise but remained with his foot sunk in the ground.

He was surprised to discover that every effort only made him sink deeper.

Gribouille, understanding that they were about to go, was dancing before him, barking furiously.

The duke tried to support himself with his hand, but it only sank, also, in the soft earth, while he seemed to sink farther still.

"I don't know where I am," he said to Chiffon who was awaiting him at the end of the alley. "It seems I sat in a hole, and the more I tried to get out of it, the farther I fell down."

She stretched out her hands, he took them and got up with a jerk. But she, too, when near him, had felt the ground staving in.

"What is there, then?" said she, while feeling the spot that M. d'Aubieres had just left.

She got up and laughed:

"Ah! 'It's the flowers' cemetery! You were sitting on it! And as I just made a burial this morning it's quite soft still."

He queried:

"The cemetery of—"

"Of flowers,—yes. Don't mention it in the house, they would laugh at me. I know well it's silly, but I so much love flowers! I cannot see them dirty when they are dead—"

Since her early childhood, Chiffon had a cemetery where

she buried her faded blossoms. She could not possibly see them dragged in the street or on rubbish. The bare idea that they might come into contact with dirty things, or be crushed under feet, or trailed by skirts, or swept with the dust, was unbearable to her. During the winter she used to burn them in the great fireplace in her room, after lighting a big fire in which they were at once consumed. But in summer, being bereft of this resource, she conscientiously buried them secretly at the end of the garden, fearing her mother's scoldings and Uncle Mare's jokes.

"Please! Do not tell it to anybody," she repeated anxiously. "Excepting Gribouille, nobody knows it, nobody! And it would enrage me if they laughed at me over it, for the only reason that I find that they would be right. It's ridiculous."

"Be sure, mademoiselle Coryse, that I shall never mention the flowers' cemetery to anybody."

Sadly he added :

"This poor little cemetery! And I, who am so unlike a flower, I have been buried in it this evening—yes, quite buried."

"Now, now!" said Coryse, "you are again thinking of all that!"

"No! But do you mind letting me go out by the small grille? I would prefer not to go to the house, with my eyes swelled as big as my fists, I would be too ridiculous. Besides, I will call on Mare to-morrow morning."

"You like him? Uncle Mare?"

"Very much. We were comrades since our childhood."

"Are you of the same age?"

"He is three years younger than me."

"It's the same thing!"

"The same thing,—yes, you are right!" But, kissing once more Chiffon's solid and supple little hand, M.

d'Aubieres told himself :

"Well, no ! It's not the same thing. It's three years less !"

Back in the drawing room, the girl looked, as if she had never seen him before, at Uncle Mare, who was reading by a lamp. And instead of replying to Monsieur and Madame de Bray, who were anxiously questioning her about the disappearance of the Duke, she thought :

"It's not three, it's ten years younger he seems to be, Uncle Mare !"

VII

THE next morning, Chiffon, lying down in the centre of the lawn, was playing with Gribouille before leaving for her course when Uncle Mare, coming up to her, said in a surly tone :

"Aubieres has gone away !"

She rose up in one jerk :

"Left? Where has he gone to?"

"To Paris, where he is going to shake himself a bit,—he needs it, poor man !"

"Ah ! you scared me ! I thought you meant he had gone for ever !"

"Would that have pained you?"

"I assure you it would have."

"Aubieres' sorrow grieved me,—but after all, now that it is all ended, I may as well tell you, my Chiffon, that I think you were right."

"That's better ! And Daddy?"

"Daddy also—"

"Then all is for the best! Will you have a ride this morning?"

"No, I have letters to write. There is some important news that I have not yet told you—*aunt de Crisville* is dead."

"Ah," said Coryse, unconcerned. "She is not my aunt, and I have not known her. Neither have you, since she never left the south."

"I did not see her often, but I was her godson—"

He went on quietly:

"I just heard that she left me all her fortune—"

"All her fortune!" exclaimed Coryse, surprised "but it is she whom we used to call: the *aunt Carabas*!* She is so very, very rich!"

"It was she who was so very rich, poor woman!"

Chiffon jumped to *uncle Mare's* neck, while *Gribouille*, imitating her, jumped after his legs.

"Oh! I am so pleased! How glad I am it is you.—That will suit you so well, so much money!"

"Let me go! You are choking me!" said *Mare de Bray*, while trying to disengage himself. "I have told you a hundred times already that you are too big to hang yourself so to my neck like a baby! It's not to be done!"

"Pardon me, I always forget! Now, to begin with, what will you do with all that money?"

"To begin with, I will travel."

"Oh!" said the child, distressed. "You also will leave?"

Resting her head upon *Uncle Mare's* shoulder, she began to weep in silence.

"Don't be so silly, child!" he admonished.

*From Perrault's tale *Puss in Boots*, in which *Carabas* was the very rich owner of many estates.

She answered, in an unintelligible voice :

"Forgive me ! I am so unnerved, I don't know what is the matter with me ! A while ago it was M. d'Aubieres, who loved me well, and left,—and now it's you—".

Her tears redoubled, and she ended her sentence :

"The fact is, the people who love me, they are not many, you know."

"But, Chiffon, I will not stay away for ever ! I am not going round the world, never fear it ! France suffices for me. elsewhere I suffer from spleen !"

"What did you say : spleen ?—Instead of saying : home sickness ? There is no shame in calling it so. I don't like these English expressions."

"I see with pleasure that you are feeling better, Chiffon ! Your little nature is coming on top. Yes, scold me if you like, but please do laugh, it is all I want."

"Now you will be in a position to take part in politics ? This time it will not be the little barley water man of the last elections who will be nominated, eh ? That money comes to you in proper time ! There is still one month left before the elections, and this is enough to fell the good Fathers' pupil who lies to labourers, lies to society people, lies all the time ! Yes, you will beat him, and it's a thing that will really please me."

Uncle Mare, laughing, asked :

"Is that out of interest for me, or from dislike of my competitor ?"

"It's both !—and what about charity ? I think that you will carry it on, on a large scale now, you who were giving from your own when you had no money—"

"How do you know that ?"

"I know your paupers well ! And when I visit them they talk about you all the time, and it's the reason why I go to them. If they didn't I could as well choose others."

whom you don't know—"

"How is it that if they talk to you about me, they never speak to me about you?"

"Because I forbid them to do it. I tell them: 'If he knew that I visit you and that he risks meeting me in your houses, you would never see him again, because he hides himself to give, like others do for stealing': Is not this true?"

"What a funny girl you are! If your mother—"

"Ah! *a-propos* of her—, does she know it?"

"What?"

"That you are inheriting—?"

"Yes."

Chiffon laughed.

"Well, she must have made a funny face! While she said that aunt Carabas would leave her fortune to charitable institutions she always hoped, really, that it would fall to daddy and you! And as only one half of this came true, and it is the wrong half, she must be in a fine temper—"

Then, returning to the topic that interested her most, she sadly asked:

"Will you be leaving just now?"

"Only for a few days, on business, but I will soon return."

"Yes, come back! You have not much time left till the coming elections. And what propaganda I will do for you! My poor old Jean, he will have to trot a lot both on foot and on horseback!

And, as the vicomte laughed, she went on:

"You are laughing at my propaganda? You are wrong. I

"You are laughing at my propaganda? You are wrong I am quite popular, although you would'nt have guessed it, quite—"

Then, changing the subject:

"What I am enjoying in anticipation is seeing the faces of the people who don't like you,—and they are many—"

"How is that? There are many of them?"

"Yes, at Pont-sur-Sarthe! I don't mean in Paris. During the three months that we spend in Paris I hear nothing about what you do, or whether they like or dislike you, but here it's quite different, I see what goes on."

"And what do you see?"

"That, excepting a few friends, everyone detests you."

"I have not done anything to deserve it!"

"Oh! yes! you have done all that is necessary to cause it! You live by yourself, and, at Pont-sur-Sarthe, it is unforgivable,—elsewhere too, moreover!"

"But I am not living alone!"

"Yes! You say: *Zut!* to visits, dinners, the club balls, matinees, the Fathers' services, garden parties—*Zut!* to Madame de Bassigny's Thursdays,—*Zut!* to everything you don't like,—in which you are quite right, of course! Only you must not imagine that this is the way to make idiots love you!"

"Yes, I am a bear, and it's wrong—"

"Why, wrong? Why should you care? Moreover, whatever you may do now, all will love you all the same, be sure of that. And how you will be in demand, for marriage! Tell me! You don't want to make a secret of it?"

"Of what?"

"Your inheritance?"

"No! I am not going to shout it from rooftops, but I won't be sorry when it becomes known."

"Hullo!" said Chiffon in surprise, "and you are always indifferent to the impressions that you produce; why do you now want it to be known that you are rich?"

"Simply because I do not want people, when they see me spend a lot over my election, to believe that I am supported by one committee or another. That way of running politics badly sickens me, I find it a dirty business."

"I don't see which committee could possibly support you, since you are presenting yourself with ideas of your own; without binding yourself to any party."

"That's true, but they would say it all the same."

"Well, in any case," declared Coryse, whose eyes were sparkling, "I am going to enjoy myself this morning! What's the time?"

Uncle Mare consulted his watch.

"A quarter to nine."

"Well, I have enough time if I hurry up."

As loudly as she could she called: "Jean!" The old coachman appeared at the door of the stable where, by force of habit, he always came, when his young mistress did not need him.

"Go and dress quickly! We are going out at once! Hurry up; in ten minutes I must be in the Place des Girondins."

The chambermaid was crossing the courtyard. Coryse accosted her with: "Has Madame la Marquise gone out?"

"No, mademoiselle."

"Good! All is well!" whispered the girl, "I was afraid she might be there—"

Blowing a kiss to Uncle Mare, she disappeared with a laugh.

Fifteen minutes later, Chiffon was ringing the bell at the Jesuits' house.

"This is the time for Father de Ragon's mass, isn't it?" She asked the porter who opened the door.

"Yes, but it is ending, it is nearly nine o'clock."

Instead of going to the chapel, Coryse remained in the garden. She walked to and fro, dainty in her blouse of pale pink batiste; her gay face half hidden in a large capeline in Italian straw, covered with roses. And, while watching the chapel door she was thinking:

"He,—first he will go to the sacristy, but as there is no other exit he will have to come out through this door. I don't want to miss him! Meanwhile, all those ladies will come out. I shall give out the news to several of them. It will be amusing!"

Entirely forgetting where she was, she did a few lively dance steps, to the great amazement of the porter who was watching her from his lodge. And old Jean, although he was well aware of Chiffon's ways, wondered at this fit of gaiety. He asked, astounded:

"But what is the matter with you this morning, mamzelle Coryse?"

She stopped, with one foot in the air and replied, laughing:

"I will tell you on our way home. Now, if you like it, you may go and sleep on yesterday's bench. Only try and find a more graceful posture."

The chapel door, closing with a dull sound, made her quickly turn her head, and she saw young Barfleur, who was leaving the mass. He was wearing a blue jacket, very short and tight, and checked trousers. His enormous necktie was very high behind his nape, completely concealing the shirt collar. In this costume he appeared, to Chiffon, smaller and more stunted than ever. He was not ugly however, and showed some distinction in spite of his slender waist and his clothes made according to to-morrow's fashion. Coryse went towards him to greet him, but he acknowledged it without stopping, and, going fifty yards ahead, seemed to wait, as she did, for the people to come out of the chapel after the mass.

"He is waiting for Madame Delorme!" thought Chiffon, who had long guessed that Madame Delorme, the very pretty wife of a Pont-sur-Sarthe notary, found young Barfleur much to her own taste.

Shortly afterwards, Madame Delorme appeared. The young man showed surprise as though he had never expected to meet her there. Chiffon thought: "The mass is not finished yet. They both came out a little before the end to have a chat."

And, seeing the pretty woman curb her flexible waist to look at the ill-grown lad who barely reached her shoulder, she thought: "This is indeed funny! M. Delorme is a hundred times better looking than him! What can she find to please her in that? Little Baffleur is devoid of spirit, of kindness, of appearance. He is ugly and silly. It can be nothing else than the prestige of parchment deeds, as, whatever people may say, it still exists for those who loathe it, their prestige! Ah! now Madame Delorme is leaving first! Then he will rejoin her afterwards—and they will have another chat in the avenue or the park—as if by chance.—"

She followed with her eyes the young woman who was going away with slim waist and wide hips and thought: "It is pleasing to be pretty! I would have liked to be pretty!"

Madame de Bray had so often repeated to Coryse that she was ugly and ungraceful, that the girl sincerely believed it.

A murmur of voices interrupted her reflections.* Madame de Bassigny was coming out of the chapel, escorted by two or three ladies of Pont-sur-Sarthe who composed a species of small court for her.

"Ah!" murmured Coryse, "I think this is a good opportunity to deliver my little speech!"

She walked slowly towards the group, her head bent, seemingly deeply absorbed in the contemplation of a pebble that she was pushing along with the point of her toe.

"Ah! Here is mademoiselle Chiffon!" exclaimed

Madame de Bassigny. "I hope you are quite well?"

"Quite well, madame," replied Coryse, who at once perceived that she was stared at attentively.

In point of fact, she was arousing some curiosity just now. The tale of the demand in marriage, the refusal, and the departure of M. d'Aubieres—who had been seen in a hackney carriage with a trunk on its top, was already spreading fast in Port-sur-Sarthe. And, when coming to the chapel, Madame de Bassigny had related it to her lady companions, amazed that this penniless girl should have refused a duke with an income of twenty thousand livres.

They were all very jealous of the poor girl and ill-disposed towards her, owing to the demand as well as her refusal.

"How can I best convey the news that Uncle Mare got the inheritance?" wondered Chiffon, while the colonel's wife stared at her. "It isn't easy! I must make it seem to be coming out naturally."

"I am doubly delighted to meet you, Mademoiselle Coryse," continued Madame de Bassigny, "as I wish to ask you to transmit to your mother an invitation that I was going to send her as soon as I got home. I want to ask her to come over to dinner Thursday fortnight with you and M. de Bray, and also M. Mare, if he will consent to it. But I doubt if he will honour us with his presence—"

Chiffon sprang upon the occasion that presented itself thus. Looking attentively at Madame de Bassigny in order to catch the minutest movements of her face, she replied in a clear voice:

"My uncle hardly ever dines out, but, at any rate, he will not be here then, because he is leaving—"

"With the Duc d'Aubieres?" wickedly asked the colonel's wife.

Chiffon did not appear to understand and, unmoved, continued:

"No, all alone,—his aunt de Crisville is dead, and—"

"Ah! Probably she died at Pau?" interrupted Madame de Bassigny..

Turning to one of the women who accompanied her, she proposed:

"There! You wanted to buy a castle? Crisville will certainly be put up for sale, it is perched too high to be turned into a hospital or an orphanage."

At Pont-sur-Sarthe, everybody firmly believed that Madame de Crisville would leave all her fortune to charitable institutions.

"No!" said Chiffon, innocently, "I don't think my Uncle will sell Crisville. On the contrary, I believe he will live there."

"He! What? Him? M. de Bray?" stammered Madame de Bassigny, aghast. "But she is leaving at least five or six millions, your aunt!"

"She is not my aunt,—and she left more than that!" boldly corrected Chiffon, who was actually ignorant of the value of the Marquise de Carabas' estate.

"More than that?" repeated Madame de Bassigny, flabbergasted and vexed.

The crowd were leaving the chapel. She said good-bye to Coryse and quickly went to meet the arrivals, keen on spreading the news around. From a distance, Chiffon saw with joy, the faces darkening as she spoke.

"They are floored!" she thought. "It was right of me to come."

She made a sudden move towards the chapel. She had perceived Father de Ragon who was advancing with his quiet and steady stride.

"I must not allow him to be grabbed!"

And, quickly, going to him she asked politely :

"Will you allow me to say a word to you?"

And, as the Jesuit was uneasily glancing at the people who seemed to be also waiting for him, she affirmed :

"It will not take long ! Yesterday I prattled far too much !"

"But no, my child, yesterday, on the contrary, you greatly surprised and interested me."

"You are so kind. But I know I was wrong in talking about my uncle and his politics, and I came to ask you to make no mention of it to my mother, who will come to see you to-day."

"I assure you," said Father de Ragon, restlessly, "that you are exaggerating the importance of your talk."

"No ! I let you infer,—or about that,—my uncle would not present himself at the coming elections against M. de Bermany, because he had no money?"

"Yes, well?"

"Well, the fact is, that he will present himself, because he has the means now."

"Ah !" said the annoyed Jesuit.

And, forgetting all the principles of discretion and prudence which habitually guided him, even in the least important of his moves, he asked squarely :

"How did he get it?"

Chiffon answered in an indifferent tone :

"He is the universal legatee of his aunt de Crisville, who died yesterday."

Father de Ragon looked stunned, his mouth half open, speechless. Old Madame de Crisville was, before the poor state of her health compelled her to stay in Pau, one of his penitents, and he remembered having dictated her in detail, what her last dispositions should be, and the Jesuits were included in them. And that old woman had died far away

from his authority, neglecting to fulfill the half promises obtained after great trouble, and left her fortune—to whom? To an honest socialist already in easy circumstances; to a dangerous man, whom she unconsciously was arming for a struggle against all that she ought to have respected and supported!

At last he queried, rather addressing himself than Chiffon, who was joyfully devouring him with her eyes:

"It is an enormous fortune?"

"Enormous!" repeated the girl in a singing voice.

"It's one-half of the department?"

Like an echo, she repeated: "One-half of the department—at least!"

Through a sudden intuition, it occurred to the Jesuit that perhaps Coryse was making sport of him. But, lowering his glance, he saw her, with a bright smile, her appearance utterly unconcerned, and it reassured him. In a flash he guessed that the "Chiffon" whom so far nobody wanted to notice, would in all likelihood become an heiress. The Vicomte de Bray's affection for his brother's step-daughter was well-known at Pont-sur-Sarthe. It was known that he greatly loved the d'Avesnes girl, not only as his niece, but as much as if she had been his own daughter. Becoming at once fatherly, Father de Ragon told Coryse:

"I am happy, really happy, over this good luck, that God sent you, as in it I truly see God's hand! Yesterday, through an excess in delicacy of feelings, and a fear of not being a saintly enough wife, you refused the Duc d'Aubieres who asked for your hand and was ready to accept you without dowry,—and to-day the Lord rewards this conduct by giving you the means that will enable you to choose a husband according to your heart."

"But," said Chiffon, who had not yet guessed what the Jesuit was heading for. "I do not see why, owing to my

uncle inheriting from his aunt, I can now choose whoever I want?—Supposing of course that my heart should wish to choose.—”

“It is very clear however,” Father de Ragon whispered, continuing to address himself as much as Corysè, “that the Vicomte de Bray will give a fine dowry to the child he nearly considers as his own, and, being a bachelor, without kin—”

She laughed :

“Oh ! of course ! You imagine that in the same stroke I have become a ‘desirable party?’ And a little while ago, I thought that M. d’Aubieres’ demand had raised my value in the marriage market !—Yes, I can see that—since then people stare at me with a respectful curiosity—what will it be now ? Honours—money, everything then ! Will that change me ?”

While she spoke, the Jesuit, who had seen young Barfleur still standing under the tree, exchanged with him some friendly signs.

“It is Hugues de Barfleur,” he said indicating the lad to Chiffon, “one of my former pupils.”

She answered without enthusiasm :

“I know him,—I know him :

“He is one of our regular churchgoers, he comes every day to attend mass, he has a very fine soul and only does what is agreeable to God—”

“I don’t know,” she burst out almost despite herself, “if it is as agreeable to Him as you say, that M. de Barfleur should come here to flirt with Madame Delorme.”

The Jesuit made a gesture of indignant protestation and sincere surprise. So far, he had not suspected it, but the girl’s indecorous remark had thrown a new light on a thousand petty facts which had passed off without arousing conjectures. Wishing to disarm suspicions and at the same

time serve his former pupil, he replied in his most insinuating voice :

"My child, from the lips of a young maiden such a remark is out of place, and, besides, you are wanting in perspicacity. Hugues de Barfleur could not possibly be concerned with the lady you mentioned, not only because his principles protect him against temptations of this sort, but also because, I have reasons to believe it, he is interested in other quarters."

"Ah !" said Coryse, distractedly.

"Yes, the poor lad's heart is somewhat entrapped. He is in love, I believe, with a young lady who so far has never taken any notice of him."

"A young lady?" queried Chiffon, puzzled and trying to guess who she might be—"a young lady? I cannot see at all—"

But, suddenly seeing it clearly she burst out laughing and asked : "Perhaps it's me? Ah ! This is a good one !"

— And, contemplating the Jesuit with admiration :

"Really, one can say that you don't waste time !"

Father de Ragon looked at her with a smile on his lips and a hard look in his eyes. Then, she apologized :

"I beg your pardon for laughing so, but it is so funny ! In this way the money that will harm M. de Bernay's chances will at least benefit M. de Barfleur,—and so it will remain in their house. Ah ! There's no doubt about it, it's well planned out !"

"Mademoiselle d'Avesnes !" declared the Jesuit in a sharp voice, "when she said you were an ill-mannered girl your mother was right.—"

"Right in thinking it, but not in saying it," retorted Chiffon quietly.

Bowing to the Father who was leaving her, she looked out for Jean, and saw him motionless on his bench. Through

force of habit she was puckering her lips, but stopped, thinking :

“Good heavens! I almost whistled for him as I used to ! What an effect that would have produced !”

Leaving the Jesuits' house she nearly ran, forgetful of the old servant who, behind her, was painfully stepping it out. She wanted to tell her news to the Abbe Chatel, certain that to him it would only cause pleasure.

At the corner of the Place du Palais, a flower girl was standing by her small handcart. Chiffon bought some roses, and still turning reached the presbytery of Saint-Marcien's church.

If the presbytery of the cathedral was unostentatious, that of St. Marcien was wretched. It was a hovel, adjacent to the old church, in a dark and dirty lane. To the left of it was a small garden, but nothing like usual presbytery gardens. Abbe Chatel, who loved flowers, had found the way to transform the small patch of land into a perfumed flower bed.

The servant being out, the priest himself opened the door to Coryse. In one hand he held a jam jar now filled with paste, and in the other a large brush which had lost most of its hair. “Excuse me for receiving you like this,” he explained to Chiffon who was gaily wishing him good-day. “I was just patching up the paper in the parlour.” And he showed her the strips of wall-paper which, loosened by the damp, were woefully hanging down.

The furniture was scanty : six straw chairs, a sunken arm-chair, a beautiful ormolu clock, elegant and of unique design, and an alabaster statue of the Holy Virgin, set against the wall, above a small bracket carrying a vase.

“I brought you roses for your Virgin,” Chiffon announced, putting the flowers into the vase, “but it is necessary to give them water promptly.”

"Yes, soon—"

"No, just now! In such heat it would be barbarous to keep them waiting, monsieur l'Abbe! And you may imagine that it is not the Virgin's wish that anything should suffer on her account."

"Quite true!" obediently said the priest, while going to fill the vase from a small tap in the garden.

Observing him Coryse thought: "He is not smartly dressed, or refined either; with his good red face under his white hair he looks very much like a tomato in cotton-wool! But I like him as he is, because he really has a fine soul! Instead of trying to arrange marriages for the little swells who have scooped in everything—he minds paupers and God! He is a man who has no use for little-tattle, or intrigues, or flirts,—and all the rest!

As the Abbe came back, carefully carrying the vase, full to overflowing and wetting his gown, she gaily exclaimed:

"Monsieur l'Abbe, I feel so pleased!"

"Ah! It's not like yesterday, then?"

He had taken up the roses, and with his large, clumsy hands, was setting them in the vase with great precaution. Then he sat opposite Coryse.

"Monsieur l'Abbe, since this morning Uncle Mare is rich, very rich."

"How did it happen, my child?"

"Well, he has not robbed a mail-coach, as you think. No, he has inherited from Madame de Crisville."

"She is dead?"

"Naturally, Monsieur l'Abbe!"

"Oh! The poor lady, who was so open handed, so kind to the unfortunates—"

"Uncle Mare will be as good as she was, be sure of it. You will see what we will get from him for your poor—"

"May God hear you, my child!"

"But," she said discontentedly, "one might think that you doubt it?"

"I do not exactly doubt it, no, but still—it will not be surprising if M. Mare should be less mindful of Heaven's affairs than his aunt was. He is young, he—"

"Young!" exclaimed Coryse, surprised, "young, Uncle Mare?"

"Well, surely he is not old!"

"I don't mean to say he is crumbling down, but still he is not young either, since he is only three years younger than M. d'Aubieres, who is old!"

"Talking about him, my child—"

"Oh!" Coryse said, sighing with relief, "he went away this morning."

"He went away?"

"Not for good! He will return. All the same Monsieur l'Abbe, had I thought that you would not feel warmer than you do about it, I would not have dragged my poor old Jean to your house, in such heat. I should have let you hear about it from other people—"

"But, my little child, you are mistaken, I feel very glad. I am happy, sincerely happy, for all that happened to your uncle and for the joy it has brought you."

"That is better! Now I'm off! It's nearly noon!" While Chiffon was on her way back, walking sprightly under the scorching sun, the Abbe Chatel, was whispering, while setting again the roses at the feet of the little Virgin in the parlour:

"God, protect that child who loves you! God! give her happiness!"

VIII

"DON'T you know?" said Chiffon to Uncle Mare, who had just returned after a fortnight's absence. "All the world is furious against you. Your letter to your constituents has revolutionised Pont-sur-Sarthe. How people will glare at you !

"I don't care—"

"I know it well. But I, when I hear people lashing at you as they do, it sickens me !"

"Who does it?"

"All our regular visitors, all the old bores who call here. I don't know why I said the old ones, as the young ones are just as bad—. And mother then ! Two days ago she came home in an awful temper before she had read your what-do-you-call-it that was posted on the walls."

"What did she say?"

"She created a scene before father ! Ah ! But that was a really beautiful one !"

"More beautiful than usually?"

"Still more !"

"Poor old Pierre !" said the Vicomte, laughing.

"It's wicked of you to laugh at it ! He is so nice !"

"It's true he is a good man. Had it been me !"

"Well, what if it had been me?"

She thought for an instant, and concluded :

"That proves that he is better than either of us, that's all !" like that—"

"Like what?"

"You say your mother is wild against me—"

"Oh ! That !"

"Then she will treat me as she would a negro."

"No !"

"She will ! She had no scruples to do it before, and now with my election to add—"

"Yes, but there is your money—"

"You mean—"

"I mean that while your election vexes her, your money enchants her. She has much respect for money, don't you know?"

"Oh !"

"There's no : Oh ! about it. It's so."

After a silence she asked :

"Did you complete your business?"

"Nearly."

"And you are rich?"

"Very."

"Good ! M. de Bernay is trying really hard ! You must beware of him, as Charlie will not pass."

"How do you know?"

"They told me—"

"Who told you—"

"The furnacemen."

Uncle Marc laughed : "Then you talk with the foundry men ? Poor Aubieres was right.—You are really a very funny little girl."

"You saw him, M. d'Aubieres?"

"Yes."

"Will he soon come back?"

"He will come back for the races."

When the ball rang for breakfast Madame de Bray burst in like a storm. With an eager look and smile stretching from one ear to the other she almost ran to her brother-in-law.

"My dear Mare ! I just heard you had returned.

"I am delighted to see you back again ! We missed you

so badly all of us, when you were away, didn't we, Chiffon?"

The Marquise never used to be nice to her brother-in-law and never did she call her daughter "Chiffon" except when, in the presence of a newcomer, she was adopting a wheedling pose. Mare, astonished, looked at her but at once lowered his eyes when perceiving the ironical face of Coryse who stood behind her mother.

"Have you seen Pierre?" asked Madame de Bray.

"Yes, I saw him as I came."

Smiling, she asked:

"Have you been informed of the terrible effect of your letter upon the electors?"

"No."

"Well, my poor Mare, you have no idea of the uproar, the unpleasant uproar that rose up against you."

"As my name is also yours I beg your pardon—"

"Pooh! *a la guerre comme a la guerre!* I am now resigned to it, for to be frank, at the first I was dismayed, absolutely dismayed."

She turned abruptly to her husband, who was coming in:

"Isn't it so? Now I am consoled of the scandal caused by Mare's posters. I have got over it bravely."

"So you said, at least," replied M. de Bray, without conviction.

Passing to the dining room, Chiffon whispered in Mare's ear:

"Set fair, eh? Did I not tell you the money—"

"Coryse," said the Marquise when sitting down, "I don't know if I told you that we will dine at the Barfleurs' on Saturday."

"No, but you never tell me when you dine in town."

"You are invited."

"Same thing to me, since I shall not be there."

"Why should you not go?" asked Madame de Bray, somewhat embarrassed.

"Because I never go to such dinners, and it has been agreed that I am not to be led into society till the winter after I reach the age of eighteen, that is to say after two years."

"You don't call that: going into society."

"I do! It means dressing up, showing myself, getting bored—that is what I call going into society!"

"I have accepted on your behalf."

"You should not have since you promised me that privacy till I am eighteen, except at home. In any case, I don't see, why I must dine with the Barfletirs rather than with Madame de Bassigny, who has invited me for that evening—"

Laughing, she added:

"Talking to myself, in the Jesuits garden, ah! you know, she invited you also, Uncle Marc! while adding sorrowfully that she did not hope that you would honour her with your acceptance—"

"That shows Madame de Bassigny has lucid moments.. On no account would I ever go to her house, but to-day in any case I can't go anywhere, since I am in mourning."

Chiffon gave a sly glance at her mother's dress, which was of so indefinite a mauve that one could not really say whether it was mauve or rose.

"Oh!" said the Marquise, "it is only a three months' morning, and at least fifteen days of it have already elapsed! And while on the subject, my dear Marc, I wanted to ask you,—you will not mind us giving a ball here on the race Sunday?"

"No, not at all,—provided I am not compelled to appear."

"But, if you don't show yourself at it, it will look like a blame on us—"

"I don't know what it will look like, but I certainly shall not go to a ball a month after the death of an aunt who made me her heir. Leaving alone the heartlessness of it, it would savour of very bad taste."

The Marquise answered, pointedly :

"As we have not the same reasons to abstain from it, and I am keen on giving this ball for Coryse—".

"For me!" exclaimed the girl, in amazement. • "For me, who loathe society!—And who can't even dance correctly! A ball for me! Oh! Lord!"

✓ "It's just to train you to behave in society,—and to give you a taste for it."

Chiffon sprang up.

"Go on! That won't fool anybody,—the tale of a ball given for my benefit! Everybody knows that I don't count for much in the house, and that whatever is done here is not done for me!"

"You are an ungrateful and impertinent girl!" shouted Madame de Bray in a rising voice which seemed to set her eyelashes vibrating.

• "Me! No!" replied quietly the girl,—“but I think it would be better to tell Uncle Marc the truth.”

"And the truth is?"

"That the ball is given to dazzle the natives in displaying the prince to them."

Marc de Bray, surprised, queried :

"What prince is that?"

• "Ah! That's true," joyfully said Coryse, "you don't know yet, you just arrived! Well, for the past eight days there has been a prince at Pont-sur-Sarthe, a genuine one! Not a cardboard prince, but one who will be reigning,—if his papa is not knocked down meanwhile."

"What is his name?"

"The Comte d'Axen,—when travelling."

"What is he doing here, the Comte d'Axen?"

The Marquise was going to reply, but Chiffon did not allow her the time to do it:

"No one exactly knows. They say he came to see the manoeuvres, or to improve his French, which he already speaks better than any of us."

Just to say something the Vicomte asked:

"Describe him, this prince?"

"He is charming," promptly replied Madame de Bray. Promptly also, Chiffon retorted:

"That's a question of taste! He is as tall as a riding foot, and dark, dark! M. Carnot would be fair in comparison with him! People address him as 'Monseigneur' and 'Your Highness,' so you understand, it's delicious!"

"He is addressed as he has a right to be," interrupted M. de Bray, who saw a storm approaching and wished to prevent the coming squabble."

"But I find it quite natural," said Coryse, "and I speak to him like that, when replying to him. Some people find it amusing others not."

Looking at her mother she added:

"Me,—humility is no concern of mine!"

Out of the lesser traits of the Marquise's mind, the one that shocked Coryse above all the others was her arrogance with poor people and her abasement before the rich. Often, after crushing a servant or workman under the superiority of her intelligence, superiority which her daughter definitely refused to admit, Madame de Bray complained of the stupidity of those whom she called, with a pouting of disgust copied from that of Madame Favart, some mercenaries. Chiffon then, both amused and irritated, used to tell her with a laugh:

"Hullo! If he had the qualities you expected in him,

very probably he would be an ambassador, and not a servant!"

Coryse thought it a simple matter to be respectful to princes when chance brought you near to them, but she could not understand that one should run after occasions to be in their presence. She loathed feeling uneasy, and only liked living alone or with her equals. Moreover, it seemed to her that, as modern princes have forgotten that they are princes, it is absurd to be compelled to make an effort to remember, instead of them, their exalted rank.

Since the arrival of the Comte d'Axen at Pont-sur-Sarthe, the Marquise was prodigiously flattered at having been visited by His Highness. The Prince had been sent to her by M. d'Aubieres who, a few years earlier, had been military attache in the small country where his father reigned. Madame de Bray, compelled in Paris to run right and left to find some well-surrounded princes who only paid scant attention to her intriguing personality, totally bereft in Pont-sur-Sarthe of occasions to air the courtly expressions in which, she imagined, she excelled, had thought that heavens' door was being opened when she read the letter addressed to her husband in which the colonel announced the visit of the little crown-prince.

This time, the most elegant drawing-rooms of Pont-sur-Sarthe were left far behind as the Comte d'Axen only knew there the four generals, the mayor and the prefect. And without a thought for Madame de Bassigny—her best friend,—who was fishing for an introduction to him, Madame de Bray had said, unconcernedly "that it was really annoying to be unable to invite a few friends to meet him, but he refused to make new acquaintances."

The truth was that she did not want to share with anybody the Highness who had providentially fallen into her hand.

There were at Pont-sur-Sarthe many elegant women, several of them very pretty. She feared that the prince, if launched among them, might lose interest in the de Bray house. It was he who forced the Marquise to break her reserve.

One evening, coming in after a visit, he remarked to M. de Bray :

"I would ask you, if it is possible, to take me to the ball at the Château de Barfleur."

The Marquise jumped :

"The ball?—whose ball?"

"A ball that will probably be given on the Sunday of the Races. This evening, while dining at a restaurant, I heard people speak about it. It is not yet certain, but—"

"But," cried the Marquise impetuously, "there cannot be a ball at the Barfleurs that day, since we are giving one ourselves."

No ball had as yet been intended. The Marquise and Chiffon looked at each other, stunned by the Marquise's assurance, but Madame de Bray was not in the least dismayed. She went on, speaking to her husband :

"Is it not so?—Having fixed the date long ago,—nobody can very well take it away from us."

The next morning, she sent out the invitations. At least, she would still be able to show that she had secured the Prince before any one else.

Afraid lest the conversation should take a more serious turn, the Marquise tried once more to conciliate matters.

"If Chiffon is not dining at Barfleur's on Saturday, you should write," he remarked to his wife.

The Marquise answered cuttingly :

"She will dine there."

"I could not dine there even if I wished to," quietly explained Coryse, "I have no dress—"

"What! no dress? What about your Pompadour dress? What does that mean?"

"It means that two years ago, I got an evening frock, — so to speak, — in woollen muslin with small posies, — the one you call 'my pompadour dress' —"

"Then?"

"Well, then, as since then I have grown up a good deal, while the dress did not grow, it reaches only to my calves, and that is why I have no dress to wear."

"We'll have it lengthened."

"It has already been lengthened three times, it can't be done any further."

"How is it that you never have anything to wear? It's unbelievable, — you don't possess one dress!"

"Yes, I have got four —"

"That's not enough."

"But, really," exclaimed Chiffon in vexation. "It's not with five louis a month for myself including shoes, gloves, hats, amazon frocks and the rest — that I could have a full set of dresses!"

M. de Bray hastily intervened:

"Order what you want, and send the bill to me."

"Thank you, daddy! Then I will order a white dress for the Prince's ball."

The Marquise's voice rose up, sharp and threatening.

"I forbid you to call it the Prince's ball!" After a silence she went on:

"Then it's all right, you will come to that dinner?"

"Ah! No!" protested Chiffon. "Surely not!"

Madame de Bray reflected an instant:

"In this case, — when you go for a ride, you will go to Barfleur's —"

"To do what?"

"Tell yourself Madame de Barfleur that you cannot dine

there on Saturday,—that you promised to dine with your aunt de Launay that day,—that I did not know it when I accepted—”

“All right!” replied Coryse with a laugh. “I understand. I’ll make out a little tale, over which all concerned will cut each other up: you, Aunt Mathilde, Uncle Albert,—in fact all the world.”

And, rising from the table:

“You don’t mind? I must go and dress, and if I am to go to Barfleur’s and be back in time for my course I had better trot off.”

“Yes,” majestically said the Marquise, “I allow you, for this time, to leave the table before the end of breakfast, but do not imagine it will create a precedent to be repeated—”

“But,” said Coryse, peevishly, “it will be the same to me to stay at the table till the end. I’m not keen on going there, nor, if I go there, to go to my course afterwards! Moreover, I can stay, it’ll be much simpler! You only need to send old Jean with a letter. In fact ‘she queried, with mischief in her eye,’ why should I have to go there myself? It’s not natural that I should.”

She sat down again, suddenly.

“You shall go there,” ordered the Marquise, her temper rising.

“No,—I would rather not. You must have some ulterior motive in sending me there, on an errand—”

She stopped an instant, and went on, bearing on the words: “to the Barfleurs?”

“No!” asserted Madame de Bray, blushing scarlet.

Again this time the Marquis tried to conciliate them:

“Come along, Chifton, go, since your mamma desires it—”

"Hum!" said Coryse, giving him under the table, a warning kick.

It was too late. The Marquise had heard, and this word: "mamma" when applied to her, possessed the gift of exasperating her. Furious, she addressed her husband:

"Truly," she began, "you--"

"H'm!--H'm!--H'm!--H'm!--" sang Chiffon in arpeggio.

The Marquise turned to face her.

"Get out! And do at once what I ordered you to do. Have you heard?"

"Yes," replied Coryse, folding up her napkin with affected slowness.

Leaving, she mumbled between her teeth:

"Oh! If only M. d'Aubieres was not so old!"

IX

REACHING the courtyard of the Chateau de Barfleur—a large Louis XV castle built of bricks and granite—Coryse saw at a ground floor window the Vicomtesse de Barfleur, sitting by a large table and very busy covering jam bottles. Her work so much absorbed her attention that she did not hear the horse's feet. Chiffon, whose intention had been, at first, to stop by the window, thought that that might not be sufficiently polite, so she dismounted at the stables, after being told that the Vicomtesse was at home.

She was led into the billiard-room where she had to wait what seemed a very long time and, while walking up and down the large bare room she was ragingly mumbling to

herself :

"What ! Is she going to finish covering all her jam pots before receiving me, Mother Barfleur?"

At last the maid servant reappeared :

"Will Mademoiselle d'Avesnes come with me? I was looking for Madame la Vicomtesse in the park, and she was in the drawing-room."

Coryse thought :

"No, she was in the pantry, but probably she thinks it would not be nice to let me know it."

She lightly followed the maid through a long line of gloomy rooms.

"Brrr !", said she, nearly shivering, "there is no fun in this place ! Father de Ragon and mother Barfleur are mistaken if they imagine that I will ever marry 'a pennyworth of butter' as I believe they do ! Ah ! No ! No ! No !"

The duc d'Aubieres, on his arrival in the locality, had asked Uncle Marc, showing him young Barfleur standing in a door-frame during a ball.

"Who is that small fellow as big as a pennyworth of butter?"

And, at the Brays' and in other houses also the nickname had stuck to him.

The maid led Coryse into a small room, better furnished and more comfortable than the rest of the Chateau.

Sitting close to the window, her high and slender waist tightly clad in a maroon foulard dress with yellow spots, the Vicomtesse seemed to be attentively reading the Gaulois. At once Coryse thought :

"I am no longer surprised to have had to wait so long ! At her jam covering her dress was grey; she went to slip on her most beautiful clothes to receive me. Heavens ! They

are doing a lot on account of Chiffon, since Uncle Mare inherited!"

"My dear child," said the Vicomtesse, rising at the sight of Coryse, what kind wind blew you to our home?" And, without allowing her time to reply: "Is she not delightful in her riding habit?"

"Delightful!" cried Chiffon, glancing at her own long arms, her long hands, and her still ungainly figure. "That's not what they tell me at home."

Madame de Barfleur was not at all put out.

"Yes, delightful! Delightful and charming!"

She pulled at the long band of tapestry on silk canvas which served as a bell cord.

"My poor Hugues will be very sorry to have missed such a pretty caller! He went to see his horse in the large meadow near the water's edge. I will send for him."

"No need to, madame," quickly replied Chiffon. "I must go now, I have a course at four o'clock."

The servant came in.

"Tell ~~Monsieur~~ le Vicomte—"

"I only came," explained Coryse, "to tell you that my mother, when she replied you that I will come on Saturday with her, had forgotten that I was dining with my aunt de Launay that day."

"What?" exclaimed Madame de Barfleur. "But that is impossible. We cannot do without you!"

Chiffon did not reply. She was smilingly listening to the big bell which was violently rung to call in the young lord of the manor, and she thought:

"It will take him at least fifteen minutes to walk up the creek, and in five I will be gone."

"I insist, my little Coryse," said the Vicomtesse, "Tell me that you will find a way to come? You will be the life and soul of this dinner."

"Me?" Coryse interrupted, amazed. "Me? But when I don't feel quite at ease I can't say two words."

Madame de Barfleur asked:

"Why should you not feel at ease, my dear child?"

"Forgive me!" quickly exclaimed Coryse, very red, "I have blundered! I mean that, anyhow, anywhere when I am not alone, I feel uneasy, because I don't trust myself."

"No, you are a charming young girl, very simple, very frank--"

"Oh! As to that!" And rising, Coryse went on: "I am going—I must return."

"Do wait a little longer. You must have tea?"

"Thank you very much, Madame, but really I am late already."

The Vicomtesse rose up also and as Chiffon, surprised at this exaggerated politeness, was telling her not to take such trouble, she replied:

"Yes, I want to see you on horseback, my son told me that you are adorable in the saddle."

"There," thought the girl, "it's out! They are all in the plot!"

While old Jean was bringing the horses, to the steps, the Vicomte de Barfleur ran into the courtyard. He took the hand that Chiffon stretched out to him, and, bowing respectfully, touched it with his lips. Being little used to this she almost burst out laughing. Then, comparing the mother and son's present manner with theirs of a fortnight ago, she felt disgusted and almost said aloud:

"They are a wretched lot!"

When Coryse got near Josephine, the big thoroughbred mare that she rode daily, the Vicomte rushed to her and, locking his hands together, held them to make a step for Coryse. She looked down upon the frail young man, his wretched back and his thin neck carrying an enormous

head; and, thinking of his thin arms she thought:

"He will surely let me down!"

Gently, and with the most gracious look that she could assume to soften her refusal, she replied, indicating old Jean who was holding the bridles of both horses.

"No. Please hold for an instant the other horse? I am very clumsy, I can only mount with Jean's help. With you I would fall down."

And, as he insisted:

"I beg of you! You don't imagine how heavy I am! A lump of lead!"

She put the tip of her foot in Jean's hand and flew upwards, seeming to rise a yard above the saddle. Then, wishing the mother and son good-bye, she rode away, her supple body undulating with Josephine's long strides.

As soon as she passed the gate, Chiffon made for the forest. She was longing to gallop in the beautiful green paths and to shake off the anger that was rising up to her head and heart.

They would not leave her in peace one moment, then. Barely a fortnight ago they were worrying her to marry M. d'Aubieres, and now they wanted her to marry little Barfleur! And not only did this idea torment her on account of the new struggle to be fought, but it hurt her self-respect.

Although M. d'Aubieres was not handsome, his demand had flattered her, and she was grateful for it; but that of M. de Barfleur had humiliated her badly.

In the first place she knew very well that, when she was penniless, "a pennyworth of butter" would never have paid her any more attention than that which a well-mannered man owes to a young girl whom he meets in her parents' house. Also, she found hideous in her eyes this ill-looking boy with his enormous whiskers, and his thin legs which

were very badly bowed through excessive riding. In her appreciation the former was "the great d'Aubieres," while the vicomte was "little Barfleur." This summed up the whole matter.

Being sound and strong, Chiffon held in horror weak and unhealthy people.

Following up the large green trail leading to the Pont-sur-Sarthe Road, she thought:

"He disgusts me, this lad. If ever it should occur to him to kiss me as M. d'Aubieres did I will smack his face with both hands. I simply could not help it. All the same, it will be seriously annoying, this affair! If again I refuse, mother will fall upon me. To do well, the refusal should come from the Barfleurs. Oh! That wretched Father de Ragon! It is he who set it all in motion! I was right in being afraid of the Jesuits!"

She stopped before the road whitened by the sun.

"It will be atrocious all the way to Pont-sur-Sarthe! I must try the path behind the foundries. There won't be much din at this hour, and I hope Josephine will consent to go there."

She directed the mare, who already pricked her ears, listening to the dull roar rising from below, into a narrow path that ran down between the forest and the iron works. At a bend of the path she saw, a hundred yards below her, a rider standing still and talking to workmen sitting on the ground at the edge of the thicket.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, turning towards old Jean. "There you are! I missed my course—here are the workmen having their four o'clock snack!"

She proceeded.

"It seems to be the Comte d'Axen?"

"Yes, Mamzelle Coryse, for sure it's him."

The path was meandering down and Chiffon lost sight

of the group. But soon, getting nearer, she heard the voices rising up to her :

"Yes," the Prince was saying, and she recognised his musical voice. "Yes, it is very good, this profession of faith, and if I were an elector in this country I would not hesitate to give my vote to the man who wrote it."

Chiffon has just passed the bend of the road.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "It's you, monseign--"

She stopped, sensing vaguely that he would rather not be so addressed, and he thanked her with a sign while replying :

"Yes, mademoiselle, it's me!"

"See, monsieur," cried one of the workmen, "here is a little demoiselle of the same opinion as yourself."

"What is this about?" asked Coryse.

"It's this gentleman who says, as you do, that in your place he should vote for M. de Bray."

"Of course!" she replied with conviction, "unless you want to re-elect M. de Bernay?"

"Ah! no! That gentleman is no longer wanted."

"Well, then? Since you know Charlie can't pass--"

"That's true! But it does not suit me that M. de Bray is a Viscount."

"That does not suit him either," said Chiffon, "but that's not his fault!"

"Why does he sign his letters: 'Vicomte de Bray'?"

"Indeed! Why not, since it is his name? Would you prefer him to cheat?—to present himself as someone other than he is?"

Suddenly glancing at the bottles, sausages and cheese laid out on the grass, Chiffon asked :

"Hullo! Well, you've had a meal!"

A dark and hairy workman rose up and saluting the

Comte d'Axen said : "It's monsieur who gave us this treat, otherwise—" He added : "On account of our minding his horse while he visited the workshops."

Old Jean, flushed and hot, was glancing wistfully at the bottles. Noticing it, Coryse said to one of the men.

"It would be very nice of you to give him a glass of something—as he is feeling very warm."

The workman pounced upon a bottle and excused himself :

"If we did not do it already, it's because we didn't dare—as usually servants—when the masters are there—"

"He is'nt my servant," she replied with a laugh, "he is my nurse. Come and drink, nurse!"

Old Jean advanced a step :

"I couldn't refuse it," he said with a delighted look on his face, "as one feels thirsty in this heat. And you, mamzelle Coryse, you must be thirsty too?"

"If you would have a glass, don't be shy to ask for it," suggested the man who held the bottle.

"I am not shy," said Chiffon, stretching out her hand.

"Wait a minute, because, for you, I must wash the glass."

He ran to the hydrant near the gate of the workshops, and returning, asked :

"Will it be beer or claret for you?"

"Claret."

She held out her hand for it, and said in a clear voice :

"To your health!"

The workman rose up :

"It's rather Monsieur's health we should drink to," he replied pointing to the Comte d'Axen.

"And I," answered the Prince, "I propose to drink to the candidate's health!"

"That's right!" thoughtlessly exclaimed Coryse. "Uncle Mare's health!"

One of the men queried:

"Then, so, you are M. de Bray's niece?"

"Yes," said Chiffon, looking at the Prince who was laughing at her little slip.

The man went on:

"Oh! We know you well, but we did not know your name! It's mostly the urchins there, in the city, who know you—"

Turning towards the Comte d'Axen he added;

"—as mademoiselle always has coins for them in her pockets when she passes by on her horse. Even, last Christmas, she brought them a case full of toys that filled up her carriage, there were more of them that they could manage to break—"

His hard eye softened a little as he concluded:

"If all the rich were like mademoiselle, and monsieur—all would be better for everybody! But some of them can't realise that there are poor people—and, such rich, I know some of them."

"So do I!" involuntarily said Chiffon, thinking of her mother.

Then she asked the Comte d'Axen:

"Are you going down to Pont-sur-Sarthe, monsieur?"

"Yes, will you allow me to accompany you?"

"Certainly."

He suggested:

"But, it will be better if we go by the path in the forest. There are too many loose pebbles in this road."

As they were disappearing into the wood, Coryse heard one of the workmen exclaiming:

"I have an idea that those two young people are

affianced ! ’

Laughingly she turned towards the Prince :

“They mean you and I monseigneur.”

“I regret they are mistaken—”

“You regret it? Politeness is a fine thing! Do you picture what I would look like, as a queen? Can you picture it? Oh! Lord! What would you do with me?”

After an instant she added :

“And what should I make of you?”

He laughed :

“How old are you, mademoiselle Coryse?”

“I was sixteen last May, and you, monseigneur?”

“I will be twenty-four in eight days.”

Presently he queried :

“Tell me! Would Madame la Marquise allow you to go about with a young man?”

“Surely not!”

“But, then—”

“You!—But, you, you are a sovereign.—That’s not a young man, a sovereign, that doesn’t count.”

She blushed, and went on, stammering :

“I mean to say, a sovereign is too much—to come into account!”

Then to change the course of the conversation she asked :

“Tell me, monseigneur, are you not afraid of being picked up and escorted back to the frontier, when you back opposition politics like that . . . you, a stranger?”

“Oh! It’s very quiet, my opposition politics, which only consists of telling workmen that, in their place I would vote for your uncle!”

“All the same, if I were you I would be careful! I wish M. d’Aubieres had returned; he would tell you what you should do, or not do, you look to me as very young for all that!”

“You seem to take an interest in me?” cried the Prince,

laughing heartily.

"I take interest, without taking interest."

"That's something! Well, I could have sworn, I who possess what you call 'flair,' that not only you were not interested in me, but had antipathy towards me."

"And that was true," frankly exclaimed Coryse, "yes, till this afternoon—and then, this afternoon, all of a sudden you appeared to me to be a good man?"

"Then, we are friends?"

"Yes."

"Then," correcting herself: "Yes, monseigneur! I ask your pardon—I speak to you very badly—"

"Surely not!"

"Yes, I do! I do not say 'monseigneur' often enough, and never 'Your Highness'!"

"Don't you worry about that! And, since we are friends now, tell me why we were not? That is to say, on your side, as, where I am concerned, there was no ill-feeling, I can assure you!"

"Yes, I'll tell you. By instinct I don't care much for foreigners, and I loathe Protestants. Then, as you are both—you understand?"

"I understand, and what do you reproach foreigners with?"

"Oh! absolutely nothing, except that they are not French."

"And the Protestants?"

"A lot of things! I find them intriguing, false, hypocrites, and whimsical! But naturally I recognise exceptions—"

"Naturally! Me, first of all!"

She laughed:

"Not only you. Others also. But I mean the bulk of the Protestants—of the French Protestants of course, since

they are the only ones I know."

"But I, seeing with what aversion I was inspiring you, I had imagined that you were mistaking me for a spy?"

"Oh! Monseigneur! Oh! no! not that! To begin with, I don't believe so much in them—spies, because very often spies are seen where none exists. It's somewhat like the mad dogs, that policemen kill to get rewards, and which are no more mad than I am, poor beasts!"

Returning to the topic that interested her most, Chiffon declared:

"All the same, it's truly nice of you to work for the election of Uncle Mare!"

"Pray do not be thankful to me for that, as I admit that the conversation you heard was the outcome of pure chance. Those men had minded my horse while I was visiting the steel works. I did not exactly know which of them had held it, and I feared, if I only fired one gun, to bring the fire of a full battery upon me. Therefore I went to the inn that stands on the high road and brought them something to eat and drink. They offered me drinks, and while drinking I chatted with them about the candidates whose posters were stuck on the workshop walls. You see that my propaganda was very limited."

"It will serve all the same! You will see how nice he is, Uncle Mare. I feel sure that, now that he has come back, you'll find the place less boring!"

"But," the Prince tried to protest, "I never."

Chiffon interrupted him.

"Go on! You won't make me believe that you don't get bored there! And so, monseigneur, you don't feel shocked by Uncle Mare's socialistic proclamation. As, it appears, it is socialistic?"

"But, I also, I am a socialist!"

"Oh!" said Coryse, shocked. "Well, better not to say

too much in Pont-sur-Sarthe, it wouldn't look well! Ah! You are a socialist, monseigneur! And will not that stand in your way to reign?"

"I hope not! But if that should hinder me, I shall hand over to another—is not that the proper expression?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"It will be an easy matter, I have six brothers! And you, Mademoiselle Coryse, you were on an electoral tour when I had the pleasure to meet you?"

"No! I had been on an errand to the Barfleurs."

"Ah! Monsieur de Barfleur, is he not a very slim young man?"

"Oh! sure! he is slim!"

"Does he not affect the English style?"

"The Pont-sur-Sarthe English style, yes!"

"And he owns a fine castle, this man?"

"Fine enough—but it belongs to his mother."

"Is his mother a nice woman?"

"Oh! no! She is a tall woman and poses. She is thin! and majestic! And she puts on a melancholy air, as if misfortunes had just landed on her. When I speak to her I always feel inclined to call her 'unfortunate princess,' and him, the little man, he is nicknamed, in the town, 'a penny-worth of butter.'"

As the Comte d'Axen laughed, Chiffon explained:

"I am not wicked, nor a sneerer, you know? No, but I can't bear them—the Barfleurs!"

"There are only the mother and son?"

"Only? That's quite enough!"

"I will probably meet them at your mother's ball, on the day of the races?"

"Sure, you will meet them—but what good will it do you?"

"I feel curious to see; after having seen the Parisian

society that I know, a little, the provincial society.

"Well, a lot of good it will do you! If only you knew how mean and gossiping and boring it is! But I quite understand that, owing to your position, you are above all that."

"But I am not above anything—"

"Not outside anything, you mean? And listen, monseigneur. I think it will be better if we do not tell that we had a ride together?"

"Ah! you are afraid of gossips?"

"Oh! not at all! But I am afraid my mother will take me away if she hears about it."

"Then what must I do?"

"Simply don't mention it. As for me, I will only tell of it if I am asked, and as nobody will ask me—"

"True. It is very unlikely that they will guess our meeting."

"If perchance they do, we will admit it."

"We will admit it—"

"Then that is agreed upon. And now we must separate before getting out of the forest! I again beg your pardon for all my lapses, monseigneur!" And laughing she added: "And I bow deeply to Your Highness!"

With a wide movement of his arm, the young Prince took off his hat and, laughing also, replied:

"I bow deeply to you, mademoiselle Chiffon."

DURING the next days, Chiffon could not move a step without meeting young Barfleur. Besides, he called on the de Brays several times under the pretext of errands on his mother's behalf. And, one evening, coming into the drawing room about dinner time, Coryse found him installed between M. and Mme. de Bray. Six hours earlier she had seen him arrive in his small carriage, but she thought he had left long before, and she stopped, speechless.

"M. de Barfleur has kindly consented to dine with us," said the Marquise, who seemed to be in a charming mood. "We will take him home to-night when strolling—"

During the hot season, M. and Mme. de Bray used to drive out after dinner, taking with them Coryse, who loathed these outings. Sitting in the landau, facing her parents, she dared not move or laugh, and had to remain motionless and dull, as she always was in the presence of the Marquise, in fear of some dreaded scene.

When Mare de Bray entered, his face expressed, at the sight of young Barfleur, such amazement that Coryse laughed. And, when her mother passed her arm under the Vicomte's to the dining room, she remarked to Uncle Mare, who seemed irritated and discontented :

"You didn't expect that, did you?"

He replied, without appearing to notice his brother's anxious glances :

"I see, so now he is one of our household, a 'penny-worth of butter'?"

"Not yet!" laughed Coryse, "but he is trying."

Uncle Mare stopped short :

"What do you mean?" he asked abruptly.

M. de Bray entreated them, in a low voice :

"Go in, children, do go in!"

"What!" said the Marquise in an acid voice, pointing to young Barfleur who was still standing by his chair, "what is stopping you?"

"M. de Barfleur is here, waiting for you to sit down."

From the moment dinner began, the Vicomte, placed opposite Coryse kept looking at her admiringly. The young girl, being short-sighted, did not even suspect it, but Mare de Bray noticed that affectation and appeared annoyed by it. His irritation even became so apparent that Chiffon who, at a short distance, could see very well, asked him suddenly:

"What's the matter with you this evening, Uncle? You look so cranky!"

Vexed, he replied:

"Nothing—or rather—I have a headache."

But, despite this pretended headache, he began to chat with his niece, and never allowed her to turn her face away from him.

Annoyed at this attitude, which she judged to be a slight to her protegee, the Marquise attempted several times to bring Chiffon back to the general conversation, but every time she slipped out of it. Then, unable to obtain anything by cleverness, Madame de Bray decided to smash her way through:

"Coryse! Your behaviour is altogether out of place! You are making such noise, we can't hear ourselves speak!"

The girl stopped talking, not even completing the sentence she had begun, and did not open her mouth any more.

The Marquise addressed her again:

"But I don't mean you must not take—you might reply to M. de Barfleur who said that—"

Chiffon answered in a soft and polite tone.

"M. de Barfleur only talks about hunts and races, they are topics that I loathe and I do not understand—"

"And what would you like to talk about *madenfoiselle?*" queried your Barfleur earnestly.

She replied in the same modest and submissive tone:

"Of nothing, monsieur—I will be quite all right without talking at all."

"One would not have thought so a little while ago!" remarked Madame de Bray sharply.

Coryse replied:

"That's true, I was too noisy. I beg your pardon."

Bending her head down, staring obstinately at her plate, she kept silence till the end of the dinner.

After serving the coffee in the billiard room Chiffon went to sit in the lounge, in a large cane arm-chair, staring at the stars which were still pale in the sky which was not quite dark yet. She was shaken out of her torpor by her mother who was returning with her hat on:

"What! You are not yet ready? But the carriage is waiting! You are so heedless! So careless!"

"Bah!" replied the girl without moving, "go all the same! I'll be ready when you come back for something that you forgot—"

Uncle Mare candidly burst out, laughing and M. de Bray turned his head to hide the smile that was tugging at his lips despite himself. The Marquise, now purple, threateningly asked Chiffon:

"What did you say?"

Unmoved, she repeated: "I said that every evening, you come back home to take the object that you had forgotten—" Then she added softly: "And this evening you will come back more than once."

She was alluding to one of her mother's pettinesses, which the Marquise thought never to have been guessed by any-

body, so convinced was she that she could fool all who measured their wits with hers.

Loving showy luxury, and everything that in her opinion was likely to dazzle or fascinate "the public," Madame de Bray had by incessantly worrying her husband, arranged that he exchanged his carriages and servants' liveries, very simple and in good taste, for others that pleased her. The landau, blue and splashed with an enormous crest, and with red wheels, was as grotesque as a hackney carriage, but the Marquise was never so happy as when she drove right across Pont-sur-Sarthe in this ludicrous equipage. That was the reason why she compelled Coryse to join them in these drives which annoyed her so much. When she did not come they had to use the victoria, which was of modest appearance. When Madame de Bray, sitting in an affected pose in the gaudy carriage with its flashy harness, stars, rings and crests, could parade before the restaurants of the place du Palais at the hours of "vermouth" or "coffee," her joy was at its height. At six o'clock, and at eight, the tables laid on the pavements were crowded with people. The officers and the dandies of Pont-sur-Sarthe fixed as rendezvous Chez Gilbert the chic restaurant, or the Cafe Perault. Instead of allowing her coachman to drive in a fine and well-metalled street, but somewhat deserted, that ran directly out of the town, Madame de Bray gave the order to go through the square paved with small and slippery cobble-stones. And more often than not, on entering one of the streets that would take her away from her preferred quarter, she would start up, and order a return to the house.

Chiffon knew very well the "Oh! I have again forgotten my umbrella!" or it might be: "my overcoat," or "my muff," or even "my handkerchief!" which occasioned a second and afterwards a third parade before the dear cafes.

Chiffon had a deep horror of these exhibitions, and when she perceived the enquiring faces turned towards the carriage and heard the noise of the swords and spurs of the officers who rose up to salute them, she lowered her eyes, annoyed, and thought:

"How these people must laugh at us!"

She, so simple and free from any desire to "flash" was enraged, at having to be party to these petty manoeuvres which made her mother appear ridiculous.

The Marquis and his brother had duly noticed what the coachman and other servants had named: "the false start" but they had never communicated their reflections on this subject to each other, and Chiffon's reply surprised and amused them.

The Marquise marched up to her daughter and, livid with rage enquired, speaking so close that her lips nearly touched the child's impertinent little nose: "

"Why should we, this evening, return twice rather than once? Why?"

"Because," Coryse replied, after having made sure that young Barfleur, who pretended to be looking for his hat at the end of the drawing room, could not hear her, "because this evening, there is a 'pennyworth of butter' to be displayed to the population."

But, while explaining herself, it occurred to her that she would, sitting side by side with the Vicomte in the blue carriage have, by and by, to pass before many people. That would be quite sufficient to suggest a coming marriage, and Coryse wished to avoid this at any cost. In her own eyes she was still, the "Chiffon," or the urchin whom nobody took seriously. M. d'Aubieres' proposal, and Father de Ragon's insinuations had taught her that now she was a young lady, and that the latter's protegee would pretend to be in love with her. Without giving her mother a

chance to begin a scene Chiffon exclaimed :

"In any case, don't worry about me, I am not going out with you. I am tired."

"That's a lie! You are never tired."

"All right! Call it a pretext! Well, without pretext, I am not going out this evening."

"You, *shall* go out!"

"I ask your permission to stay."

"Go and put on your hat!"

As Chiffon made no move, the Marquise rashly got hold of her wrists.

The girl jerked her hands free and cried :

"It's ridiculous, you know, such intimate scenes in the presence of a stranger --"

The Marquise turned towards M. de Barfleur, instantly changing her convulsed face into a smiling one.

"Oh! M. de Barfleur nearly belongs to our home!"

"That may be," said the girl, wishing to make the situation quite clear, "but he is not nearly a member of our family, and you often quote a proverb which says that one's dirty linen must be washed in the house—not in public."

"All right! all right!"

After a pause, while the Marquis and "a pennyworth of butter," with their overcoats on their arms, were awaiting the signal to start, the Marquise resumed :

"If I insist on your accompanying us, it's because it is not proper that you should remain alone in the house."

"I always stay here. Besides, I am not alone since Uncle Mare is here."

"But probably your Uncle will go out."

Mare de Bray answered drily :

"You know well, my sister-in-law, that I never go out at night."

"Then I entrust Corvande to you."

A little nervous, Mare shrugged his shoulders and replied :
"Be certain that I will take care of her—I'll make sure that she does not dirty her clothes or play with the lamp."

And, as little Barfleur, bent over the hand that, by force of habit, Coryse held out to him, and was kissing it he took his niece by the arm and drew her away, saying :

"Come along ! Come, Chiffon !"

When they were together in the small parlour, Coryse said gaily to her uncle :

"It was a hard pill, eh ? And yet I was not needed in the carriage this evening, since there was a third one to make the landau necessary."

Seeing that he was installing himself beneath the lamp and tearing off newspaper bands :

"You know, if you have something to do, don't think it compulsory to stay with me."

"I was just about to tell you the same thing."

"Oh ! me ! Whether I do my tapestry-work here or elsewhere, it's all the same to me. Only, when papa goes out in the evening you generally work in your room."

With a laugh he answered :

"Yes, but on such evenings which are, in the winter, nearly every evening, you are never so particularly placed in my keeping as you are to-day."

Coryse went to fetch the large silk tapestry-work, full of quaint animals and warriors that she was copying from the designs of Bayeux hangings, and came to sit near Uncle Mare.

After a while he stopped reading, and looked, above his newspaper, at the little head with disordered hair which was attentively bent over the bright coloured silks.

"Chiffon," he asked suddenly, "when before dinner, I referred to that young fop and remarked : 'What ! Then he belongs to the house, now !' you answered, 'not yet, but

he is trying to'—"

"Yes?" said the girl, raising her face.

"Well," he went on, hesitating a little, "I did not quite understand what you meant by that?"

"I meant that 'pennyworth of butter' would like to marry me."

The Vicomte jumped up :

"That's what I guessed ! And . . . and you are talking about it so quietly ! Marry you ? That grotesque man ? But it would be crazy ! It would be monstrous !"

"Therefore you need not worry about it in the least, as he will never marry me," replied Chiffon with a laugh.

"Ah !" said Marc, reassured, "that's better !"

She looked at him affectionately :

"You are very kind to feel so much concerned about me !"

She remained silent a while, then went on :

"Yet you are the reason why he wants to marry me."

"Me?"

"Yes, as soon as it was known that you had a windfall, the rumour spread that I am to be very rich, that you were giving me a dowry, that you would leave me all your fortune—"

"That is true."

"But what about your children?"

"What ! my children !"

"No ! But after you get married—"

"I never will marry, my Chiffon, I should be too much afraid to have a wife like—" He had intended to say "like your mother," and concluded instead : "as certain wives I know. I am very distrustful, and will remain a bachelor."

"Very good ! Then, if you will—"

"If I will?"

"I will go and live with you ? I will look after your

house. I do not want to get married at all either, but, when I am twenty-one I shall certainly not remain here.” And seeing that Uncle Mare was moving she added; “—not a day longer, not even for the sake of poor daddy, who is so good, and who will certainly miss me a lot. On the other hand I am well aware that my absence will remove many difficulties from him. But all the same, he will regret his Chiffon—”

Surprised, the Vicomte asked :

“You say you will go away from here? Where will you go to?”

“I always thought I should ask Aunt Mathilde and Uncle Albert to take me back—but if only you would have me? I would be so, so happy ! I love you so much, if you knew—yes, still more than daddy. Perhaps it’s wrong, but I can’t help it !”

She added, warmly :

“I adore you, you see !”

A little pale, he stammered.

“I do not deserve to be adored my little Chiffon.”

“You do !”

“Instead of keeping house for your old bear of an uncle, you will get married my child. You will have babies who will be fit substitutes for Gribouille and old Jean.”

Seriously, she answered :

“Well, shall I tell you? I feel sure I shall never marry—yes, sure—I don’t know how to explain what is going on inside me, but, nobody appreciates me.”

“Nobody? What are you saying? That poor Aubieres, who is certainly a handsome man, intelligent and kind, although, of course, he has begun to lose his freshness. As for the other, he is a little monster !”

Coryse laughed :

“Go and tell it to Madame Delorme !”

"Ah! You have heard the rumours then? Well, what Madame Delorme, who is a silly goose, loves, Barfleur, his name, his title, English clothes, horses and castle."

"That's what I think. But, still it's something—something that other women may love too—but me, you see. I feel I will never love anybody."

He asked, anxiously:

"Then, perhaps you are already in love with somebody?"

"Certainly 'not!' Chiffon replied with such conviction that Uncle Mare, fully reassured, smiled.

She went on:

"No! I don't love anybody, for marriage, I mean. For instance Paul de Lussv who is said to be such a handsome man, and M. de Trene, whose company people fight for, I would not have them. I know well, what I'm saying is ridiculous and I have no right to be so hard to please, with such a face as mine."

"With your face?" asked Mare, surprised, "What do you mean?"

"Of course! I am ugly!"

Stupefied, he stammered:

"Ugly? you, ugly?"

Sadly she replied:

"Oh! I know it well, it annoys me quite enough."

"It's your mother who told you that? But, on the contrary, you are very pretty!"

"You are telling me this to please me, or perhaps you really think so because you love me very much!"

"Listen, Chiffon," said Uncle Mare, "I very seriously repeat what I have said. You are now, and in two or three years' time you will be still more, a very pretty young woman. Reflect that Aubieres has had . . ."

As he stopped, Coryse queried:

"What has he had?"

"I mean--do you think that Aubieres, who is a connoisseur, would have got so crazy about you if you were not pretty? No, it is necessary that you know what you really are, and you may believe your old uncle who is telling it to you."

"Then," joyously exclaimed the girl, "the Chiffon is a pretty woman?--a pretty woman! How funny! And how glad I am to be so! And how thankful to you I am, for telling it to me! But that will not stop me from keeping your house, rather the opposite--" and coaxingly: "I beg of you, Uncle Marc, I beg you to say: yes? And till then, never leave me, never leave me here without you. If you knew how horrible for me they have been, those fifteen days! I cannot do without seeing you! I cannot!"

Slipping down from her low chair, Coryse sat on the ground and laying her head on the Vicomte's knee she plaintively entreated, her eyes full of tears:

"Never go away any more? Say you will never go away?"

As, in a nearly brusque movement he tried to get up, she forced him to sit down again by wrapping her arms tightly around him, and asked:

"You are dismissing me? Why are you that way with me, tell me! Many times has it struck me already, you are no longer the same. In the old days you used to make me sit on your knee, you would kiss me--"

He answered:

"In the old days, you were small. Now you are no longer of an age for that."

She stammered, while two big tears rolled down her cheeks:

"One is always of the age to be loved."

"But I do love you, I love you as much as I ever did," replied Mare de Bray deeply moved, "only, please! move, go back to your chair--"

(While he was trying to push her back the gate bell rang faintly, pulled evidently by a timid and hesitating hand. Uncle Mare shook Chiffon :

“Do get up, for heavens’ sake ! You can’t remain in this position ! It may be a visitor coming !”

She rose, and having already recovered her spirits, replied laughingly :

“A visitor ? Who could it be . . . ringing the bell so . . . as if ashamed ? It sounds like the cook’s young man, when the bell rings that way.”

The servant came in :

“Monsieur le Comte d’Axen—”

“Madame la Marquise is out !” snapped Coryse.

“Ask him to come in !” ordered Mare, with apparent relief.

“Oh !” said the surprised Chiffon, “you are receiving him ?”

And, in a sorry tone, she added :

“It was so nice, with just you and me.”

Then, suddenly, looking anxiously at her uncle :

“What is the matter with you ? You are pale—pale—I have never seen you so yet ?”

“I am all right,” replied Mare, embarrassed. “It’s the heat. I’ll be all right in a minute.”

He went to meet the Prince who was coming in, while Chiffon followed him with her blue eyes, now pensive.

“Monseigneur, my sister-in-law is out. So it will be my niece who will introduce me to Your Highness.”

And, as the girl seemed to be, in her mind, a thousand miles away, he called :

“Coryse ! Did you not hear ?”

Gaily, she ran to them :

“Oh ! You may as well say ‘Chiffon’ ! Monseigneur knows it well ! Monseigneur, this is Uncle Mare, for whom

you are doing propaganda in the country."

And, to the Vicomte, who was listening surprised :

"Ah! You don't know yet! It's true, that I have not seen you alone since yesterday! Well, imagine that, returning from Barfleur's I found Monseigneur in the act, of telling the ironworks men that they should vote for you. And he was serving them with drinks!"

"Truly," commenced Mare, "I am . . ."

Chiffon interrupted him :

"Yes, but, you know, you must not tell them at home that I met Monseigneur and rode with him-- in the forest. And I really rode with him."

She turned to the Prince and concluded :

"With Uncle Mare, it's different. You may tell him everything."

Noticing that the Vicomte was listening, looking serious and with his eyebrows raised, which in him was a sign of discontent, she added sadly.

"Except to-day however! To-day I don't know what is the matter with him, he does not seem to be himself."

"I came," said the Prince, "to thank Madame de Bray for her kind letter, she wrote to me this afternoon--"

"Again!" thoughtlessly exclaimed Chiffon, thinking :
"Then she writes him twice a day!"

"She wished to propose to me," continued the Comte d'Axen, "some invitations to her ball, would I like certain people invited, and, with that in view, she took the trouble of sending me a list, which I have brought back."

He laid an envelope on the table and, rising said, "And now I will take leave of you."

"But, Monseigneur," insisted Uncle Mare, with a haste that surprised Coryse, "if you are not doing anything special to-night we will be delighted. . . ."

Chiffon went to order tea; then to put Gribouille to

sleep, and to make sure that her flowers had been watered. When she came back, shortly after, the two men, who were talking about many things which interested them both, paid little attention to her. •

At eleven o'clock, when the Prince left, Coryse asked Uncle Mare, who had accompanied him as far as the gate :

"How do you find him?"

"Quite intelligent and nice . . ." And, suspiciously, he asked : "Why did you tell me the opposite?"

"The opposite of what?"

"You said : 'he is tall as a jack boot, and dark—dark' !"

"Well ! That's true— he is ugly ! At least, I think so."

"Really ! And who is good looking, in your opinion?"

"Well ! I really don't know ! Or, may be, you !"

"Me?"

"Yes, I'm not saying that you possess Grecian beauty ! no ! but I find you look well, as you are ! Then, I hate small men, delicate men, and the very young men ! A man only looks like a man after the age of thirty-five."

"What hard luck on Aubieres that the age limit was not pushed a little further back ! As for the little Prince, find him quite all right."

"So do ! But I have only thought so since I had that ride with him."

Uncle Mare again raised his eyebrows :

"Yes ! Let us talk about that ride. Really sometimes your mother is right ! You behave like a badly brought up girl ! At your age, is it correct to run about in a forest, alone with a young man?"

"Oh ! A King !"

"What difference does that make ? A King is a man?"

"If you like. Well. I was not alone."

"You had Jean, had you not ? that old fogey !"

Sadly the girl said :

"How wicked you are getting! How wicked!"

"Wicked? Because I do not applaud your whims? Because I do not encourage you to flirt in the forest with birds of passage—"

"Now he is just a bird of passage! A little while ago he was a gentleman!"

The Vicomte got quite angry.

"I am getting tired of your ill-manners. May be it is true that I spoilt you, that I laughed at your run-away-foal's ways, which are no longer funny! That I encouraged your bad instincts? But, if that is true, if I am to share the blame for what is happening to-day I feel sorry for it, very sorry indeed!"

In his harsh voice, one could yet detect tears. Chiffon tried to take his hands but he rashly drew them back.

Then, rigid in front of him, the prey to an intense emotion which she wanted to hide, she weakly stammered:

"But that's not possible! They changed you during your journey—Uncle Mare!"

XI

THE day of the dinner at the Barfleurs' M. de Bray had a serious cold which had swollen his nose and nearly closed his eyes, and he declared to his wife that he was unable to go out. He had fever and would go to bed. The Marquise protested:

"That will be too bad for the Barfleurs! We were fourteen people, Madame de Barfleur told me so."

"What about it?"

“Now we will be thirteen at the table, naturally! They can’t find another guest two hours before the time of the dinner.”

“I am awfully sorry, but I feel too ill to go.”

Laughing, he added:

“You believe that, being thirteen at table, one of you will die within a year? Well, I am sure that if I were to go there I would die of it although there were fourteen.”

“If Coryse would replace you?” suggested the Marquise.

“That, never!” said the girl, with conviction.

M. de Bray insisted:

“My little Chiffon, it will be so nice of you if you will go!”

“Oh! No! please don’t insist.”

And, imagining that she had found an excellent pretext for staying at home, she explained:

“I must dine with Uncle Marc, as otherwise he would be quite alone, since you are going to lie in bed.”

Uncle Marc, who so far had not appeared to hear what was being said, promptly protested:

“Not at all! Don’t you worry about me! What a silly idea! One would really think that I am in need of a maid!”

“No, but you always say that you don’t like to be alone at table.”

“I never said so!”

“Oh!” said Chiffon. “Not once, but a hundred times you have said it.”

“Well, I didn’t know what I was saying! And, look! If you would be a good Chiffon, you should go to that dinner with your mother. You should go there to please me!”

The child looked at him with deep astonishment, almost suspicion, in her eyes.

“How is that?” thought she, “after all he told me two

days ago about little Barfleur and this marriage idea, and all that, now he is sending me there! Me, who am never taken anywhere!—and it will look as if I am running after him!”

She answered :

“In any case I cannot go to Barfleur’s this evening.”

“Why not?” asked Madame de Bray.

“I told you the other-day, I have no dress.”

“But what about the dress your father is giving you?”

“I ordered it for to-morrow. It is not ready yet.”

“In this case, your Pompadour frock can soon be done up.”

“Now that everybody is used to seeing me in long frocks, for a year past it will be found surprising, with good reason.”

She added with a laugh :

“All the more so because, if the frock is not tied with strings to my shoes, my knees will be seen when I sit down.”

Uncle Marc got up.

“Go and put on your hat. I am taking you out with me, and I promise you that you will have a dress by this afternoon.”

“Oh!” said Coryse, still resisting. “Are you also determined to send me there? Well, I will go, since you want it.”

And, leaving the room, she said to herself with a glance of reproach to Marc who was avoiding her eyes :

“He does not want to remain alone with me like the other evenings. But why does he not want to?”

The Vicomte took Chiffon to the best dressmaker of Pont-sur-Sarthe, whom she only knew by name, and whose stairs she climbed with respect.

Not only did not Coryse’s modest allowance allow her to get her dresses from Madame Bertin, but the Marquise

herself did not patronize the great dressmaker. Entirely devoid of taste, incapable of discerning the gracefulness of a well-cut dress from the ugliness of an ill-fitting one; never understanding the effect of the different colours or trimmings, and only minding the materials in her idea, feminine toilet was reduced to "what produced an impression," and what did not. When she said of a dress or a garment: "it won't be noticed," it did not matter to her that it was a deliciously made article, it was considered a negligible quantity and, when seeing it later on on a well-dressed woman she would exclaim: "It's most surprising! Madame X-- spends so much on her toilet and yet she always wears frocks that will never draw anyone's attention!" According to her, these tailors and dressmakers who charged high prices for their work were "thieves." She only admitted the market value of the cloth and the length to be used, and it would have been useless to explain to her the difference the cut produced.

She was the same where art was concerned. Never, she used to say, would she understand that even among the very rich people anybody could be stupid enough to pay fifteen thousand francs for a portrait when one could be had for two thousand, and often, moreover, more "embellished." A novel, if not crammed with facts and intrigues, was in her opinion "hollow." She often declared that she did not comprehend "how anyone could like Loti who was badly wanting in imagination."

Consequently, Madame de Bray used to buy materials and give them to incompetent women of Pont-sur-Sarthe, who turned them into frocks that fitted her very badly. Chiffon did the same, with similar results, except that the cloths selected by her were in better taste, and the shape, always the same, very simple: a kind of Russian blouse, which only vaguely outlined her small and elegant figure.

When Uncle Mare entered, followed by his niece, Madame Bertin's salon, it surprised Coryse to see that the saleswomen knew him. Immediately, her brain began to work.

"What on earth could have brought him to a dressmaker before this? And it was a dressmaker who did not work for Madame de Bray, or Luce de Girvy who was extremely simple in her dresses, or even Madame de Bassigny who was afraid of meeting there some 'cocottes'."

And, while awaiting Madame Bertin who was busy with someone else, Chiffon asked Mare curiously:

"They know you here? How is that?"

"I came here before—I—I designed some costumes for the de Lussac's ball, last year—"

She corrected:

"One costume, not some! Yes, I remember now, one for Madame de Liron—"

"Hers, and others—"

"No, hers and none other! It caused enough sensation, you know!"

"Don't talk so loud!"

"Nobody is listening," said Chiffon, pointing to the shopgirls who were coming and going through the salon.

She remained absorbed and silent a little while, and then whispered, as though continuing a conversation with herself:

"Here is another who deceives her husband, Madame de Liron!"

"Will you be quiet?" exclaimed Uncle Mare, glancing around with a worried look. "Don't talk so, for goodness' sake." Then quite angrily he added: "Young girls must not talk of things of which they understand nothing, or should not understand—"

"I know well that I ought not to understand them, and

moreover I don't understand much of them. But I hear something, don't I? And, unless you stop my ears with cottonwool like cousin Balue's—"

"One only hears what one listens to!"

"Ah, surely not! I never listen and yet I always hear. And sometimes I would rather not! For instance, that time when Madame de Liron—"

"I forbid you to mention names! You might be heard by a servant, a chambermaid—anybody of her household—"

"And do you imagine that they don't know everything that goes on, her household people, what their 'lady' does?"

"In any case it is not necessary that they should hear it from you."

"Or from you, especially, eh?" Visibly unnerved, she added: "Moreover, I don't see why you are always talking about her—Madame de Liron?"

The door of one of the fitting rooms opened, and young Madame de Liron, wrapped in a pink gauze cloud, blew in like a storm, followed by Madame Bertin:

"I have been told you are here, and I would not let you go without a good morning!"

She shook the Vicomte's hand, and, turning towards Chiffon:

"Good morning, Mademoiselle Coryse."

Then, to Mare:

"You came to order a frock?"

He answered, hesitating and uneasy:

"I came for my niece—"

The young woman burst out laughing.

"So you are acting the mamma! 'How touching'!"

Seeing the constrained look on the Vicomte's face, she hurried to add:

"My compliments, moreover! Your daughter is charming!"

Chiffon did not appear to hear. She was looking at the young woman, who was very pretty, plump and with dimples. Her brown hair curled over a softly shaped forehead. She had large and smiling dark brown eyes, a well-shaped nose, a very small mouth which was charming as long as she did not open it, and a beautiful complexion. Her shoulders, round and plump, could partly be seen as her corsage was widely décolleté. Her ears were flat and colourless, slanting backwards more than they should do, and placed too far from her hair.

Such as she was, however, Chiffon understood, although she did not care for this style of womanhood, that she was very pretty and must be very pleasant.

As Mare remained silent, the young woman went on:

"You will get her something pink, I hope. Pink is the only colour to suit a skin like hers. And! Really! At least it would be polite to tell me what you think of my frock!"

He replied absently,

"Quite well done!"

"Really, judging from the way you say so, one would'nt think so! It's for to-morrow, for your sister-in-law's ball. Ah! I just remembered, we are dining together this evening at Barfleur's?"

"No, I don't dine out much, as you know; moreover I am in mourning!"

"Yes, that's true. I have not seen you since you returned."

"I only came back yesterday, and I cannot go visiting yet."

"I suppose not."

She went to feel some cloth that was unfolded on an arm-chair and, passing him, she whispered softly:

"But you could have met me otherwise."

Uncle Mare glanced furtively towards Chiffon, trying to

guess whether she had heard or not.

Very white, close-lipped, staring at the floor, motionless as a statue, the girl seemed unconscious of anything. Only the quick beat of her temples showed life in her, and Mare thought :

"Her mind is in the clouds—she has not heard."

Madame de Liron, returning from her inspection of the cloth said :

"But your brother and sister-in-law will dine there this evening, will they not?"

"My brother is not well. My sister-in-law will go there with my niece."

"Oh ! It was to be, if I am not mistaken, Mademoiselle Coryse's debut in society? I will be delighted to be with her this evening."

Chiffon bowed thinking :

"Well, it's not the same with me, then, because now I have heard that she will be at the dinner the outlook seems to me to be worse than ever !"

Uncle Marc spoke to the dressmaker :

"Tell me, Madame Bertin, when may I consult you? I am in a hurry, I need a dress for my niece and must have it by five o'clock. It is already half-past one."

"Well," said Madame de Liron, "I surrender Madame Bertin to you. I don't need her any longer." And she returned to the salon.

"Madame," Uncle Marc asked, "what can you suggest?"

"What can I do? As you realize, Monsieur le Vicomte, we cannot make you a frock to order by five o'clock. We can only try some of our models on Mademoiselle d'Avesnes, and if there is one which nearly fits her we can have it altered in time."

"But your models are faded?"

"Well, a few have been worn by our mannequins to

display them to customers, but most of them are quite fresh."

Looking at Coryse she proposed :

"There is a pink frock which—"

"No !" abruptly exclaimed Chiffon, "not a pink one ! I don't want it."

A little while ago, Madame de Liron had told Uncle Mare : "You will get her something in pink?" That was enough to determine her to select any other colour than that.

Madame Bertin asked :

"Is there any colour that you would prefer, mademoiselle?"

"I don't care," said Chiffon, "any colour you like except pink."

And she added :

"Yet, I love white."

One of the establishment girls was bringing a dress of white silk muslin. Madame Bertin opened a door, and taking Coryse through it :

"Will Mademoiselle try it on?"

Seeing that Mare was not moving she asked him :

"Are you not coming in, Monsieur le Vicomte?"

Uncle Mare followed her, and sat in a corner of the room, where already Chiffon, getting out of her frock, spread on the floor around her feet, appeared quite slim, in a short petticoat and a silk jersey to which her stockings were attached.

Old Uncle de Launay, who was in charge of the child's physical education, had never tolerated that she should wear corsets, garters, or boots.

He declared those articles too ugly and unhealthy. Nothing, he used to affirm, so much depressed the form and flesh as corsets and garters did, or spoil the shape of ankles

and insteps so much as boots did. He might, in case of need, allow corsets or boots to conceal imperfections, but never, garters. Consequently Chiffon had grown up unhindered, and when, at the age of twelve, her mother taking her back home again, had wanted, according to her expression, "to make her a waist," the little one, unable to stand any discomfort, had struggled with such extraordinary violence that her mother had had to yield. Chiffon, moreover, explained her refusal to "wilfully put her body out of shape."

"I want," she used to say, "to have the waist that God gave me, which is mine and not a copy of the neighbour's! I don't say I am better shaped than she is, but I like myself better as I am! At least I don't look as if I had swallowed a walking stick!"

And looking furtively at Madame de Bray's waist she would conclude:

"I think that a big chest and large hips with a narrow waist make a horrible combination! It looks like a pillow bound tight in the middle!"

After Chiffon had donned the very simple little dress, with superimposed cloudy rows in the skirt, falling straight down, and with a flounced corsage which draped her bust, Madame Bertin exclaimed:

"It does fit very well! Only a few stitches are needed! Of course, with a nice waist everything fits! And mademoiselle has such a fine waist, is it not so, Monsieur le Vicomte?"

"Yes, certainly" stammered Marc, who was seeing as in a dream Chiffon's transformation.

In this elegant and well-made dress, out of which appeared her pretty shoulders, her arms, rather thin but well-shaped, the child looked so different from what she usually did that Uncle Marc told himself:

"They will not recognize her this evening!"
Just then the salon door opened and Madame de Liron, glancing in, said:

"Are you in need of any good advice?"

"No, thank you," answered Mare, very red.

The young woman then saw Coryse, and stood as if petrified. Then violently shutting the door, she shouted to the Vicomte:

"Well, I bet you're not getting bored!"

Fifteen minutes later walking, with Uncle Mare in the rue des Girondins, Chiffon declared, without even naming the young woman as she was certain that he was thinking of her:

"All the same—she seems rather free with you!"

He replied, sullenly:

"She is free with everybody!"

The girl shook her head, sending her light hair flying about it.

XII

AS anticipated by Uncle Mare, Chiffon was hardly recognized, and her entrance in the Barfleur's hall assumed the proportions of a triumph. However mistrustful of herself she was, she realized the sensation she was producing. She even burst out laughing in the face of Madame de Bassigny, who was contemplating her, looking vexed and stupid.

"It annoys her to see me so nice," she thought.

As for the Marquise, the admiration inspired by her daughter was enrapturing her. Not being really wicked but

merely vain and silly she fully enjoyed everything that in any way contributed to throw her into the limelight. Chiffon's success was flattering to her. The elongated noses of her excellent friend Bassigny and of young Madame de Liron greatly rejoiced her, and she was benevolently looking at Chiffon who, well-surrounded, was receiving compliments with a surprise rather than shy stiffness.

On their own side the Barfleurs were very uneasy over this unexpected transformation. They thought that even if her people would agree to give them Chiffon when she was only rich, they might refuse to give her, now that she was also pretty. Madame de Barfleur, irritated by the sight of M. de Trene, the handsome hussar whose company people were fighting for, and M. de Bernay, the late Deputy of the Right, and the Comte de Liron, brother of Madame de Liron's husband, "the biggest party in the locality," all eagerly pressing around the little d'Avesnes girl, called Coryse and made her sit close to her, in order to watch her. Chiffon docilely obeyed. It was immaterial to her whether to sit here or there when she had not Uncle Mare, or her papa, or anyone she loved, to talk to.

It is true that there were her cousin de Lussy, Genevieve and her brother, but Coryse was not greatly attached to Genevieve, a handsome and wide-awake girl, two years older than her already up to all the tricks and coqueties of society.

At last Madame de Barfleur, hearing the grating of carriage wheels on the yard exclaimed :

"Ah ! Here he is ! I was afraid he might not have returned."

Chiffon, who was awaiting with indifference the arrival of the last guest, was greatly surprised to see the Duc d'Aubieres come in. And so keen was her joy in seeing her big friend that she sprang up and ran to him saying :

"Oh ! How glad I am to see you !"

The colonel had stopped, surprised; failing to recognize, at first, Coryse in the elegant person who was so warmly welcoming him. And when, seeing the flying hair and the little face that was smiling at him, he realized that it was really "the Chiffon" standing before him, his long and serious face expressed such great surprise that Coryse, guessing the cause of it, exclaimed :

"What! You also—you cannot make me out?"

Suddenly it occurred to her that she was curiously observed, and she heard Madame de Bassigny tell the Marquise while leaning towards her :

"She is right! At least your daughter does not pout at her jilted suitors!"

Madame de Bray, irritated by Chiffon's behaviour, answered :

"She is ridiculously childish for her age!"

And Coryse thought : "This time, they will be right in chiding me, I've been tactless."

The Duc d'Aubieres was remaining a little moved and troubled, being so unprepared to meet Chiffon here, who never went to anybody's, and moreover he had never expected to see her almost as a woman, well dressed, her long hair on her shoulders being all that remained of her former appearance.

But, as he looked at her more attentively, he felt himself growing more calm, and more resigned to his loss of her than if he had found her as he had last seen her.

If he had thought himself, once, very near the little penniless Chiffon, he now found himself very remote from the rich Mademoiselle d'Avesnes. She seemed to him to be but a re-incarnation of a formerly loved being."

He was examining her with an amazed, nearly respectful, curiosity, and little by little he felt that the passion which had driven him towards Chiffon was weakening.

"What is the matter colonel?" enquired Madame de Bassigny, "are you fired after your journey?"

"No, madame,—why do you ask?"

"Oh! You seem all—strange!"

He bowed.

"It's probably an air that is natural to me. But tiredness has nothing to do with it."

Madame de Barfleur, who could not, however eagerly she wished it, place Coryse by the side of her son, had at least tried to avoid the alarming danger of the handsome de Trene or M. de Bernay, both of whom were marrying men and dowry-hunters. Therefore she had installed the little d'Avesnes between the Duc d'Aubieres who was safe, and M. de Liron.

During the dinner Chiffon, delighted to be near the Colonel, had gaily chatted on every topic that interested them: Uncle Mare, Gribouille and Josephine, and also painting and books, M. d'Aubieres, being more cultured and intelligent than most society men. Towards the end, while conversation was getting more noisy and nobody paid any attention to them, Chiffon had, in whispers, related the courtship to which "the Barfleurs" subjected her, Father de Ragon's insinuations, and the little manoeuvres against which she had to defend herself.

"And," asked the Duke, "what does Mare say to all this?"

"He finds it all idiotic, as you may well imagine. And yet, it is he who made me dine here this evening, and gave me a dress for it. I don't know what's the matter with him, but he is changed, he is no longer the same towards me."

"How is that?"

"I could not really explain it, he is whimsical, he gets hard with me when I don't deserve it. It's trifling, may be, but yet it's something—"

"I will go to see him to-morrow morning, I said good-bye to him so hurriedly, the day I ran away—"

"Talking about that," asked Chiffon timidly raising her clear eyes to the duke's, "you are no longer aggrieved, I hope?"

He frankly answered :

" 'Not aggrieved' is not quite accurate, but at least I am wiser, and I thank you for being sensible for the two of us."

"That's good."

After an instant she went on :

"You were saying that you will see Uncle Mare to-morrow. It will be the Sunday of the races."

"Yes, I will call on Mare in the morning."

"You know that in the evening there will be a ball at home? That will be a boring affair! Ah! another thing. He is quite nice, the little Prince you sent us, and the ball is given for his benefit."

"You find him nice—my little Prince?"

"Yes, now! At first I found him dull, but now we are very good friends."

After dinner, Madame de Barfleur asked Chiffon to serve the coffee with her son, then she enquired :

"Will you allow smoking, mesdames? If so the gentlemen need not leave us."

Coryse, who hoped that the smoking room would rid her of the "pennyworth of butter," whose languorous airs and sentences veiled in mystery irritated her deeply, made a grimace and went to sit in a corner, aloof while Genevieve de Lussy, already quite a society lady, and fully launched out, was correctly flirting, while occupying with Madame de Liron the centre of a group of men. After a short time Madame de Bray signalled to Chiffon to come to her, and angrily whispered to her :

"For heaven's sake, don't stick in a corner without

speaking. You look like a goose!"

• "What do you expect me to talk about?"

"About anything! Just take part in the conversation!"

The young girl, perplexed, went to sit down again. She did not know the art of talking to say nothing and, her mind having so far been mostly occupied by her studies and childish or intellectual subjects she was at a loss as to how to break into a purely social conversation.

She remained silent yet for some time, vainly trying to discover an occasion to put in a word or two. Then she gave it up, in spite of her mother's furious glances.

While she was dreaming of Uncle Mare who, at this moment, was presumably reading his newspapers, or of Gribouille who was probably eating his soup, she noticed that a certain agitation was occurring in the room. Following a discussion concerning the genuineness of a portrait of Henri IV hung in front of her seat, young Barfleur took an enormous lamp which seemed too heavy for him and, climbing upon a chair, tried his best to throw a light upon the painting. The King's face detached itself well, seeming to stand out from the dark old canvas.

Chiffon, staring at the features exclaimed amiably:

"Here is a king who had not got a Protestant's hobbin-- Henri IV!"

The remark produced a chill, and Chiffon, at once aware of it, suddenly remembered that the de Lirons were Protestants. Intending to alter the course of ideas, she said again:

"Yet still it's on account of him that I have such a ridiculous name!"

Impressed and gracious, young Barfleur asked her:

"What! a ridiculous name?"

"Well, my name is Corysande, did you not know it?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, I did! But it is not a ridiculous

name, on the contrary it is charming.

“Oh! That’s a question of taste.”

“And why is it on account of Henri IV that you have been given this name you dislike?”

not—it’s in remembrance of ‘la belle Corysande’—”

And, seeing that “pennyworth of butter” did not understand, she repeated:

“‘La belle Corysande.’ Don’t you know?”

Without conviction he answered:

“Certainly.”

“Ah! It seemed that you are not quite conversant with that story? Well, la belle Corysande was the Comtesse de Quiche, and she was an Avesnes’ godmother—in 1589. Since then, all the Avesnes have called their daughters Corysande, it’s a tradition!”

“Perfect! But still I don’t see how Henri IV counts for anything in—”

“What did I tell you? You do not seem to know,” laughingly exclaimed Chiffon, “Henri IV was something in it, because it’s on account of la belle Corysande’s fame that it’s flattering to have her for a godmother and that the tradition was established—and she is famous, la belle Corysande, because Henri IV—don’t you know—?”

“Certainly, certainly!” quickly interrupted Madame de Barfleur, fearing that her son’s ignorance might be unduly exhibited.

Although very ignorant herself, she exactly realized the danger and possessed in a high degree that silent tact that women usually have in such cases.

The Duc d’Aubieres looked at the other portraits and enquired pointing to a General of the Empire.

“Who is this one?”

“That,” replied “pennyworth of butter,” looking scorn-

fully at the dumpy ancestor, leaning on his sword, in a "General Fournier-Sarloveze-de-gros attitude"—"That, is my grandfather."

"Oh!" said Chiffon, startled, "well he does not look much like you!" And continuing to examine the General with respect she added: "It's not surprising that these men did great things!"

"It is only unfortunate," replied Barfleur, "that those great things were done for Bonaparte's glory!"

"For the glory of France, you mean?" corrected Chiffon.

"No!" replied young Barfleur, happy to hold at last a topic of conversation. "They only served Bonaparte, and Bonaparte will never be, in the eyes of the world, anything but an usurper, an enemy of France—"

"In the eyes of society people, you mean?" exclaimed Chiffon, whose ears were becoming scarlet, "an enemy of France, the Emperor? And it's the people returned from Coblenz who dared called him so! Those who rejoiced to see France invaded! And to arrive at a smart result: Louis XVIII!"

Little Barfleur declared with unction:

"Louis XVIII was a great king!"

"A great king!" said Coryse, "a great king, that empty bladder? In reality, you make as much of him as of a black cherry! You defend the king just as you go to mass,—as a matter of fashion, and as it is not thought chic to be an Imperialist—because the Imperialists are all broken down and swaggering."

"Thanks on behalf of the imperialists, mademoiselle," said the Duc d'Aubieres, bowing to her and laughing.

Madame de Bray sprang towards Chiffon and, whispered threatening "Shut up! You are perfectly ridiculous!"

The girl answered with sincerity:

"That does not surprise me! But why do they make it a game to run down my emperor? And then, it's you who told me to talk, to say anything,—but to talk!"

Seriously fearing that her offspring might engage in another conversation, Madame de Barfleur, proposed, sitting at the piano:

"There are three girls who can dance, here. What about a turn of waltz for the young people."

Immediately, le bean Trene, M. de Bernay, and the Comte de Liron rushed to Chiffon. But young Barfleur, being nearer to her, promptly seized her.

Feeling herself thus caught by her waist, Coryse stiffened herself and cried:

"No,—I—"

She was going to say: "I'm dancing with M. d'Aubieres," and summon him, with a sign to come and rescue her, but she reflected that it would be useless. However vague were her notions of politeness, she understood that she would have to dance, at least one, with the master of the house.

And, as he had stopped, speechless, she said:

"Anyway it doesn't matter. Let us make a start."

Though young Barfleur was a bad talker, he danced beautifully, and Chiffon experienced real pleasure in feeling herself carried away through the immense drawing room. At once her partner led her into the ill-lit gallery which, he said, was more roomy.

But, what about the others?" asked Chiffon, looking out to see whether Genevieve de Lussy and Madame de Liron were following them.

The Vicomte stopped, leaning out of the door to call the waltzers.

"They are coming!" he said

Holding her waist again, he resumed dancing.

But they remained alone in the large bare room. Madame de Liron only liked waltzing before spectators, and Madame de Lussy, who knew her daughter well, did not allow her to stay away from her maternal eye.

"They find her very pretty—Madame de Liron, don't they?" asked Chiffon.

Since morning, the face of the young woman haunted her, and she could not help talking about her.

Young Barfleur answered, distractedly :

"It's mostly your Uncle de Bray who find her so."

"Ah !" gravely answered Coryse.

"But you, Mademoiselle, what do you think of her?"

"Too plump. And you, what do you think?"

"Me?" answered he, pressing Coryse tighter against his shoulder, "I don't even look at her. I can only see you ! It's you who are pretty, so pretty !"

Chiffon had not heard. Engrossed, in the pleasure of waltzing with a good dancer, she was yielding herself to the enjoyment of it, frankly supporting herself on his arm.

Emboldened by this abandon, he bent towards her, and whispered in accents which he was trying hard to render passionate :

"I love you !"

He was speaking so close to her ear that she felt her hair blown by his breath. Astounded, she stopped short, and, abruptly recoiling, she exclaimed in a dumbfounded and indignant tone :

"Well ! That's a stunner !"

XIII

THE Marquise ran into the library where M. de Bray and Marc were smoking. "Will you please tell Corysande that she must come to the races? Now she is saying she won't go."

"But," said Chiffon, who was coming in behind her mother, "I don't see why I've got to go to the races? I never had to before."

"No, but, before you were a child."

The Marquis thought it best to speak:

"Go, my Chiffon! You who love horses—"

"It's just because I love horses that I don't like races. It will not amuse me to see a horse kicking about with a broken hoof like at Auteuil, two years ago, the day you took me there."

"But such an accident is not bound to happen every time."

"Such accident or any other, it's all the same to me! Moreover it's not only on that account that I will not go to the races."

"One must not say 'I will not go'," remarked M. de Bray.

Docilely, Chiffon corrected herself: "—that I would rather not go to the races."

"Ah! Then what is the reason?"

"It's because it tires me to be always among a lot of people! I only love to be alone and at peace—with my animals." She looked affectionately at her stepfather and her uncle and concluded: "—or with you two, that's true! This morning, Mass; this afternoon, the races; this evening, the ball! It's really too much for one day, all that!"

Madame de Bray exclaimed, raising her eyes to Heaven :

"The Mass ! She puts the Mass in the same bag as the rest !"

Chiffon was up in arms :

"Yes, certainly !—when it's Mass like this morning. You refused to let me go to Saint-Marcien's Church, under the pretext that Jean was needed to help in the house—on account of this evening—"

"Well?"

"Well, you took me with you to the Jesuits, and mass at their place, it's just 'five o'clocks' that take place in the morning. People greet each other, they wait for each other near the exit, to-day you spoke to more than fifty persons !"

"But, you also, you spoke to them, I don't see what you have to complain about?"

"But that's just what I am complaining about, can't you see?"

"I don't understand what discomfort you should feel over meeting society people who . . ."

"That's a question of taste ! It wearies me terribly. And after seeing it at Mass and again at the ball I am sick of it—society !"

"If I am compelled to go to the races, I will have been so bored in the open air I will fall asleep in the middle of the drawing room this evening."

"This girl is beyond redemption !" said the disheartened Marquise. "We must give up trying to obtain anything from her."

And she made a noisy exit.

"Ouf !" said Chiffon, stretching herself out on a large divan, "it's done at last !"

"I do not understand," commenced M. de Bray, "why you will not go to the races with your mother. You—"

“What! You don’t understand? Then, go there yourself for a bit.”

“With me it’s different! I have an awful cold, and this afternoon I will hardly be presentable.”

“As for me, I have not yet recovered from last night’s stupefying dinner!”

Uncle Mare asked:

“By the way how did it go on, yesterday’s dinner?”

“In the most tiresome manner! Fortunately, however, M. d’Aubieres was there, otherwise. . .”

“Ah!” said the Marquis, “Aubieres is back?”

“Yes,” said Mare. “And he came this morning when you were out. He wanted to see you, to present his excuses for not having come in the other evening, to say good-bye to your wife and you, after his stroll in the garden with Chiffon. The fact is, he was not feeling up to much, poor fellow.”

He added with a laugh:

“Can you guess what Chiffon had told him in the garden? Don’t even try; you’d never guess. She had said sweetly:

‘I prefer to tell you the reason why I can’t marry you.—Well, I don’t want to because I am sure that, if I did, I would be false to you.’”

“Oh!” said M. de Bray, laughing.

Corvse shrugged her shoulders.

“So it appears all that is funny! It would have been better to let him presume a lot of things?”

“Well,” said Uncle Mare, “I don’t see that there could have been anything worse to tell him?”

Alarmed, she asked:

“Is he angry with me?”

“Him? Good heavens, no! The poor fellow would never dream of being angry with you.”

“Good! In fact, I was thinking: it’s not possible that

he be angry with me, otherwise he would not have been so nice to me at the dinner. It was my good luck to sit near him!"

"So all went well?"

"Except . . . then my mother did not tell your

"I only saw your mother at breakfast. You were there, so you know we did not refer to yesterday."

"Well, I put my foot into it a bit! First of all, about Henri IV."

"About Henri IV?" asked the surprised M. de Bray.

"Yes, because, when they were looking at his portrait I said he had not a Protestant's bobbin. You will understand, as the de Lirons are Protestants, it did not sound very nice."

"Well!" said Mare, "if you did nothing worse!"

"Oh! yes, I did! but it's my mother's fault. She had called me to tell me that I should talk, even if I had nothing to say. So, as soon as I had a chance, you can imagine how I jumped at it!"

"Let us hear the second blunder?" Mare asked, highly interested.

"It's not exactly a blunder, but I got angry and said things I ought not to have said, and it all came out about Napoleon."

"Oh!" said M. de Bray, scared, "if they attacked Napoleon!"

"Yes, you know how that always upsets me."

"You behaved improperly?"

"Well, that is, if you like—"

After a silence she declared:

"At any rate I was more proper than the master of the house!"

"How is that?" asked the Marquis, astonished. "M. de Barfleur is correction personified!"

"Not with me, in any case."

"What did he do to you?"

Flushing at the recollection of the events of the day before, Chiffon, still angry, said :

"He 'thoued' ~~me~~ was that proper?"

"He 'thoued' you?" said Mare, annoyed. "How did he 'thou' you?"

"Well, as I may be thoued ! It happened while waltzing, he had led me into the gallery, under pretext that there was more room. Then, what was it that happened? Ah ! yes ! he began by telling me that Madame de Liron was plumpish—that is to say—no, I'm getting mixed up, it's I who told him that. He kept repeating that I was pretty, that none there were pretty—"

As she had stopped, Uncle Mare, worried, asked :

"And after that?"

"And then, all of a sudden, he bent over me, and he told me—" Imitating the appropriate voice which at that moment young Barfleur had assumed, she whispered : "'I love you' !"

Her tone was so comical that, in spite of his ill-humour, Uncle Mare could not help laughing.

Coryse, irritated, inquired of him and her stepfather :

"Do you find that proper?"

Conciliating as ever, M. de Bray replied softly : "The English thou God !"

"They don't know any better !"

After a moment of reflection she asked :

"Will it last a long time, that joke?"

"What joke?"

"Well, little Barfleur? It certainly will not flatter me, if people should believe that I could marry a 'pennyworth of butter' !"

Timidly the Marquis whispered .

"He is nice."

"Nice!" cried the girl, angrily, "Nice! He is grotesque! And his style of dressing is ridiculous! Besides, he perfumes himself! With white heliotrope, to make it worse!"

"But, there are circumstances when a man may slightly scent himself—"

"No!" exclaimed Chiffon, whose temper was steadily rising. "A man has no right to smell of anything but tobacco!"

Then, to Uncle Mare:

"That makes you laugh! You think it funny! Moreover, you are getting very unkind to me. Yes, unkind! It started long ago, but these last few days it has become worse. It's since that evening when young Barfleur dined with us."

As the Vicomte was about to protest, she went on again, annoyed:

"I don't mean that you are not good to me! For instance, where presents are concerned, you gave me a dress—a very fine one, and I'll wear it this evening, because it's much prettier than the dress papa gave me. Yes, you give me things. but where loving me is concerned, it's nowhere!"

"But I do—"

"No, you don't! And, to begin with, if you loved me, would you want me to marry a monkey like little Barfleur—would you?"

"But I never told you—to"

"But you don't say a word against it, either! And I won't have him—the monkey! nor any one else, either."

She marched towards Uncle Mare and went on, bitterly:

"And it's your fault if they are worrying me, if they want to marry me—yes, it's on account of your dirty money! Without it, they would all leave me in peace, as they did

before !”

Hiding her face in her hands, she sobbed violently :

“Leave her alone,” said Mare to M. de Bray who was going over to the girl, “she is thoroughly unnerved. Let us go, and let her weep, it will relieve her.”

About to leave the library, the Marquis turned round and, looking at Chiffon who was still crying, whispered to Mare :

“She never had nerves before, this child ! It’s not natural. I wouldn’t be surprised if she were in love.”

“You are mad !” exclaimed Mare, flabbergasted. “Whom could she love ?” And anxiously : “I hope it is not de Trenc, at least ? That fellow will beat his wife and squander her dowry. Nor de Bernay ? She hates hypocrites, nor de Liron ? An idiot ?”

As his brother did not answer, he shouted to him abruptly :

“Then who ?—who ?”

Unmoved, M. de Bray replied :

“How do you expect me to know ?”

XIV

“WHERE is Uncle Mare ?” asked Chiffon in the evening, on entering the drawing room a few minutes before the guests were expected. “I have searched for him everywhere.”

“You know well that he is hiding himself underground, this evening,” said the Marquis. “What do you want of him ?”

“I want to show him my dress, he only saw me in it at daytime, and in the evening I look so much better !”

"You will show it to him some other time; he is very cranky this evening."

And he added, laughing:

"It appears everybody has nerves, to-day?"

"Yes," said Coryse, "at dinner I saw that he was not himself. What do you think is troubling him?"

"He is ill-tempered," declared the Marquise.

"No!" promptly protested Chiffon, "no, he never will be that." Then, reverting to her former idea: "Shall I go and see him?"

"No" replied Madame de Bray sourly. "Stay here. People will soon come in."

The girl's face became gloomy:

"Oh! That is true, it's ten o'clock! Who will arrive first? I bet that they will be the most wearisome of all! Right! What did I say? It's the Bassignys!"

Effectively, Madame de Bassigny, tightly clad in an elegant dress with silver trimmings, followed by the Colonel, also in a tight uniform which was climbing up his back, making a fold which crossed from shoulder to shoulder. Madame de Bassigny appeared vexed for being the first to arrive. She thought it did not look well, and threw the blame for that fault against etiquette upon the Colonel.

Then, in a sharp tone, she enquired from Coryse whether her political discussion of last night had not interfered with her sleep? The girl replied that she was such a sound sleeper that she could always sleep, even after the most boring evenings. The arrival of other guests stopped a conversation which was threatening to take an acid turn.

Young Barfleur came in, stuck to his mother's skirt and visibly worried over the possible aftermath of his declaration. He admitted to himself that really he had "put too much passion into it" and had gone beyond the limit.

The indifferent welcome from Chiffon, who did not seem

to remember anything, entirely reassured him, and he soon recovered his assurance, going and coming in his ungainly fashion cackling here and there.

The Comte d'Axen's entry acted on him like a cold shower. He began, by examining him with great respect, impressed to some extent by the presence of a real Prince. But soon he forgot the Prince and only saw in him "a rival."

The arrival of this man, younger and certainly better-looking than himself considerably reduced his prestige.

When the orchestra played its prelude, Barfleur rushed towards Coryse, but he arrived at the very moment when she was starting, on the Comte d'Axen's arm. He noted, with displeasure, that the Comte danced admirably three-step waltz, as only men from his country could.

This evening, not only would he be successful owing to curiosity and etiquette, as was his right, but, as a man also he would deserve his success. Barfleur, therefore, could not console himself.

He ran to Madame de Liron who, followed by her husband and her brother-in-law, was just coming, delightful and bright in the pink frock glimpsed upon at the dress-maker's, and he asked her for "this waltz."

But, above all, the little woman wanted to exhibit herself to the Comte d'Axen, and she knew that in the arms of small men women never look their best. Therefore she, answered, irritated by this untimely eagerness:

"By and by! I have only just come in. Give me time to breathe!"

Then, addressing the Marquis:

"Then, it's serious? Your bearish brother is not here?"

"It's serious in the utmost."

"And he won't put in an appearance?"

"He won't."

She raised her eyes to the ceiling :

"He is up there? Above all this din?"

"Yes."

"Why does it matter to her—where he is?" Coryse wondered while looking at the young woman, all fresh under her halo of sparkling diamonds.

Nothing in this plump doll with her eyes bright with mischief, and her somewhat vulgar outline, could please Chiffon. But, seeing the enthusiasm, provoked by her presence, she was thinking, with a painful endeavour to understand this admiration which she could not explain to herself :

"Perhaps it is because she is certainly pretty !"

The Duc d'Aubieres came to her :

"What are you thinking of, Mademoiselle Chiffon? You look like a conspirator—"

Coryse blushed :

"I am not thinking of anything."

"Really! Yet you look preoccupied, I could almost say gloomy, if such a word could possibly be applied to you."

As the troubled girl was muttering a meaningless reply he affectionately enquired :

"Have you any sorrow? Is something wrong?"

"No, I have no sorrow, nothing—" quickly replied Chiffon.

And, wishing to put an end to these questions which, for some reason that she did not understand, embarrassed her, she questioned :

"Uncle Marc's election is assured, isn't it?"

"I believe so! But he does not seem to be worried about it. I saw him this morning and he did not utter three words to me! He seems to forget that the election will be next Sunday. He too, looks preoccupied."

"Ah," said Coryse, alarmed. And at once she thought :

"Perhaps it's on account of Madame de Liron that he is preoccupied?"

The colonel noticed the vague look in Coryse's eyes and the tightness of her lips:

"Again, you are far, far away, Mademoiselle Chiffon—far away, in the blues—"

"Not quite."

Gradually they had moved to the large bay windows opening out on to the garden. The night was stormy, a heavy heat was about them.

"It's stifling; in this room," she said, shaking her hair.

And she went out, followed by M. d'Aubieres.

"Hullo!" exclaimed the Duke, his nose up in the air, "there he is. He is peacefully walking up and down his room, not even suspecting that we see him from here!"

Chiffon looked up, and saw Uncle Mare's tall figure which detached itself, very darkly, from the luminous frame of the window.

"Hullo! yes! There he is!"

• Madame de Liron was coming into the garden on M. de Bray's arm. She also saw the Vicomte

Gaily she shouted:

"It would be a good joke—to go up and say good evening to your brother! What do you say to it?"

"But," said the perplexed Marquis, "I really don't know—"

"Yes! Let us do it—will you? It will be very amusing! Let us go to his room in a farandole?"

And, addressing the Colonel:

"Will you join in, Monsieur d'Aubieres?"

"No, Madame, I would be afraid that my friend Mare might push me out of the door!"

"And me?" asked the young woman, smiling, "would he push me out also?"

Without waiting for an answer, she turned to M. de Bray:

"Suppose I went up, say, very quietly, by the library stairs, that would be a fine trick to play on him?"

"Excellent!" whispered Chiffon, in an extremely impertinent tone.

"Lead me there, Monsieur de Bray, will you?"

"Madame, I—I have many things to mind here," explained the Marquis, very much embarrassed about the role which the young woman wanted him to play. "But, Aubieres will take you there."

"As far as the steps only," said the Duke with a smile, offering her his arm.

Coryse remained alone.

The handsome Trene, slender in his hussar's uniform, was coming down the steps.

"May I greet you, Mademoiselle Coryse?"

Chiffon, who was rushing to follow M. d'Aubieres and Madame de Liron, stopped, ill-pleased at being hindered.

"You have already greeted me!"

She had spoken rather loudly. Immediately Uncle Mare's silhouette reappeared at the balcony and remained immobile there.

"I did when I arrived, but I have had no chance to compliment you about your lovely dress."

Coryse did not reply, and he went on:

"After all, is it really the dress that is lovely? I do not want to pay you a banal compliment, Mademoiselle, in repeating what you must have been told a hundred times since yesterday, but you are—"

"Charming!" interrupted Chiffon with a laugh. "Yes, that's agreed upon!" And, anxious to get off, she abruptly added: "And if this is all you have to tell me—"

Puzzled, he replied:

"But, I would also beg of you to give me a waltz?"

"Which?"

"Whichever you will kindly give me. The next if you will?"

"The next is for the Comte d'Axen."

"Again!"

"What do you mean by 'again'?" exclaimed Coryse, irritated. "Are you keeping account of the dances I give to this man or that?"

She stopped short. It seemed to her that Uncle Mare was leaning out and listening to them. But she did not dare to look up and reveal his presence.

The handsome Trene resumed:

"The next waltz, then?"

"It will be M. d'Aubieres. Will you have the fourth, counting from the present one?"

The Comte d'Axen was coming, almost at a run:

"This is my waltz, Mademoiselle Chiffon!"

At the window, Uncle Mare's big shadow was moving about, uneasily and Coryse thought:

"I would bet that just now his eyebrows are displaying anger."

"Mademoiselle," asked M. de Trene, "I wish to have the honour to be introduced to Monseigneur le Comte d'Axen?"

Chiffon, regretfully taking her eyes off the window, turned to the Prince:

"Will you allow me, Monseigneur?"

And, as he bowed his assent, she quickly mumbled:

"Monsieur de Trene—"

"I am delighted to meet you, Monsieur," said the Comte d'Axen, offering his hand to the officer. "We will be, next week, companions in your regiment, as I have been authorized to attend the manoeuvres, and I am to go with you."

Then, holding Chiffon by her waist:

"May we waltz on this fine terrace? One hears the music

quite well here, and it is very hot inside."

She did not object, not daring to resist him, but yet afraid, she did not know why, to displease Uncle Mare, who was still standing at his balcony.

When the Prince stopped, he told Coryse:

"I very much regret not having seen your uncle this evening."

"He is in his apartment, owing to his mourning," she stammered, furtively glancing at his window.

"He is a charming man, whom I like very much! We have been out together many times these last few days, on foot or horseback."

"Hullo!" thought she, surprised, "he did not tell me that he never mentioned him since the other evening."

The Comte d'Axen went on:

"M. de Bray is the most intelligent man I know, and he possesses a fine soul."

"Doesn't he?" exclaimed Chiffon, delighted.

"It will please me very much," he continued, "if the manoeuvres end in time to allow me to leave with him."

"Leave?" she asked, distressed. "Where is he going?"

"But—has he not told you?"

"Yes, yes," said she, trying to make him say more, "he said—about—"

"Well, directly the elections are over, M. de Bray will travel for two months—"

"Is that so?"

"He wishes to enquire personally into many cases of poverty. In short, he wants to do, and certainly can do, very much good. Your uncle, Mademoiselle Chiffon, is one of those rare men who spend their lives in doing beautiful deeds which they conceal as if they were crimes."

"Oh! I have already told him that!" whispered, Coryse, who was making frantic efforts to hold back the tears.

The thought that Uncle Mare was about to leave was terribly upsetting her. On his return, if he was elected, he would go to Paris where the de Brays only installed themselves in the spring. She would not see him any more! Perhaps never at all!

At this moment the Vicomte, who was leaning over the balcony, suddenly turned towards the inside of his room. Obviously somebody had entered.

"It's her!" thought Chiffon, whose heart was beating wildly..

And, as the waltz was ending, she bowed to the Prince and slipped through the dancers, who were regaining their seats.

Reaching the library, she climbed up the old, oaken staircase which gave direct access to the Vicomte's apartments, determined to look, listen, find out in any way, something definite. But, suddenly she stopped, disheartened.

"No!" thought she, "that would be bad! And then, I know all I wanted to know."

A swishing of tulle and silk told her that somebody was climbing down, just above her. Running down the stairs she hid herself behind the steps.

Very spruce, Madame de Liron passed close to her and returned to the great drawing room, shouting to make it clear that she made no secret of her visit:

"Ah! He didn't like it, imagine that! He was little short of angry!"

"She lies!" thought Chiffon. "He was quite pleased. She is only saying that to conceal the truth."

Going up to Mare's room, she went in.

Sitting before his desk, his head laid on his arm, Mare did not hear her come in. Deeply moved, she asked him:

"What has she done to you?"

Hearing her voice he rose up.

"What are you doing here, child?"

Seeing his sorrowful face, Chiffon felt an immense tenderness for him whom she loved so much! She forgot all, repeating, surprised and deeply moved:

"You are crying? Why are you crying? My God!" Then, timidly: "On account of her, isn't it?"

He burst out:

"I don't know who it is you call 'she'! But I beg you to return to your dances and flirts! Go and listen to de Trene's compliments, and waltz in the garden with Axen if that amuses you, but leave me alone in my rooms!"

She whispered: "Alone—to cry?"

"To cry if that suits me!"

Chiffon saw, in his dressing room, two large trunks open. Feeling mad, she asked:

"You are going earlier?"

"Earlier than what?"

"It's the Comte d'Axen who—"

He sneered:

"Ah! When you are together you speak of me?"

"Yes! He said that you will travel, to help people—"

As he did not reply, she asked in a trembling voice which betrayed all her terrors:

"And me? What will become of me?"

Without looking at her, he replied in a cutting voice:

"What! You don't imagine I'll take you with me—or stay here to serve you as a maid?"

"Oh!" sorrowfully said Chiffon, whose blue eyes filled with tears. How you speak to me, Uncle Mare, in what ugly manner!"

"Why will you torment me so?"

At first she made no reply, immobile, in the centre of the room, all pink in her snow-white frock which outlined her small but young and strong body. Her fair hair, flying

all about her head in the breeze from the window gave her the appearance of a fairy, a small quaint and unreal being. And, despite himself, Mare, who had raised his head, was looking at her with an expression of immense tenderness in his reddened eyes.

Being too short-sighted to see his look, Chiffon asked, after long reflection :

"So, from what the Prince told me, you are going away to do charitable deeds?"

He shrugged his shoulders. Coryse went on :

"Well, I—I could tell you a good deed to do, and without going far away?"

And, as he did not answer, she whispered very low :

"It would consist of marrying me—"

Very pale, the Vicomte stepped to her :

"What did you say?"

"You heard me very well."

He replied in a raucous voice :

"This jest is cruel, not funny!"

"A jest?" exclaimed Chiffon, stunned. "Oh! my God! But I love you above all! And there are times when I believe you love me more than anyone also. Therefore, I am telling you: Marry me!"

"Chiffon!" softly said Uncle Mare, drawing the girl into his arms. "My Chiffon! Oh! Yes, I love you! I love you! I love you! I love you!"

"Then, you agree?"

He covered her with kisses without speaking. She sighed, trembling all over.

"Oh! How lovely it is—to be kissed by you!"

Then, in an outburst of laughter :

"Aren't they going to pull long faces, down below, when they hear it?"

Uncle Marc was still looking at Chiffon, hesitating to believe it was all true. Bending over her face he whispered, in a kiss :

“Ah ! Little Chiffon ! If you could guess how unhappy I have been, and in what despair ! and how jealous !”

“Jealous ! You should never have been that !”

And, pressing herself firmly against him, she stammered, sweetly and tenderly :

“—and it would badly surprise me if ever I could deceive you !”

THE END

